CTC SENTINEL

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Contents

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The Abbottabad Documents: Bin Ladin's Security Measures

By Liam Collins

Pakistani security personnel watch as Usama bin Ladin's Abbottabad compound is destroyed. - Aamir Qureshi/AFP/Getty Images

WITHIN A MERE week of his death, Usama bin Ladin asserted that "reality has proven that American technology and its sophisticated systems cannot arrest a mujahid if he does not commit a security error."[1] Although Bin Ladin witnessed numerous senior al-Qa`ida members killed or captured by the United States and its coalition partners over the years, his words suggest that he attributed these losses not to superior U.S. technology, but to error or carelessness on the part of individuals. He was of the view that adhering to "the required security precautions [for people] in our situation" is feasible and human error is avoidable if the mujahid is "conscious of the importance of the mission he is fulfilling and is capable of staying in hiding until the situation opens up."[2]

Notwithstanding the limited number of recently released documents captured during the Abbottabad raid, they shed some light on the operational security (OPSEC) measures that Bin Ladin followed and urged others to follow to evade detection by the United States. Letters authored by Bin Ladin, assessed

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1 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000010, p. 8. The pages of the documents received by the Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) are not all numbered in the original Arabic version. The English translation numbers the pages to correspond to the content of each page of the Arabic version. To avoid confusion, this article refers to the page number in the Arabic version so that the reader can easily find it in the English translation. All of the Harmony documents can be found at the website for the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point.

2 Ibid. The quality of the English translation provided to the CTC is not adequate throughout. When the translation was deemed inadequate, quotations cited in this article have either been amended or translated anew by Muhammad al-`Ubaydi at the CTC.

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to have been composed between late 2010 and early 2011, reveal that he was preoccupied with OPSEC measures.[3] His letters portray a man with a strategic vision, favoring patience over rashness and prioritizing the long-term safety of his operatives over the short-term gains of actions that might jeopardize security. Indeed, Bin Ladin was interested in winning the "long war," not merely the irregular small battles.[4]

This article examines Bin Ladin's concerns with signals intelligence (SIGINT), imagery intelligence (IMINT) and human intelligence (HUMINT). It also discusses the operational security measures that he implemented or attempted to implement to counter U.S. collection capabilities. Finally, it assesses the impact that these security measures likely had on al-Qa`ida's ability to conduct operational acts.

Beware Everything
Usama bin Ladin was clearly OPSEC savvy or he would not have evaded the United States for close to a decade after the 9/11 attacks. His letters provide some insight into the range of considerations and calculations he made: he avoided using the phone and e-mail; he was concerned with technical surveillance such as aerial photography, satellites, and "chips"; and he was concerned with human threats to include "traitors," Iranian and Pakistani intelligence, and even locals. Given that Bin Ladin lost many senior al-Qa`ida leaders over the past decade but was incapable of knowing exactly how they were detected, his concern was clearly justified.

Bin Ladin was especially alarmed by aerial photography. On several occasions he described a part of Waziristan as the "area within the perimeter of American aerial photography."[5] He believed that "the Americans have great accumulative experience in photography due to the fact that they have been doing it in the area for so many years. They can

distinguish between houses frequented by men at a higher rate than usual."[6] Thus, he recommended against meeting hostage negotiators in areas of Waziristan within the perimeter of U.S. aerial photography. When discussing the movement of his son Hamza, he told Shaykh Mahmud (who has been identified as Abu `Abd al-Rahman, or `Atiyya) that "[Hamza] should move only when the clouds are heavy."[7] Additionally, given all the surveillance in Waziristan he stressed the importance to move the "brothers" occupying leadership positions out of Waziristan and "away from aircraft photography and bombardment."[8]

Another concern for Bin Ladin was the potential for tracking devices to be embedded in even the smallest of items. For al-Qa`ida members who were being released from Iran, he advised that "they read the letter before they go in order to alert them to some security precautions including not bringing with them any of the things that they had in Iran, such as their luggage."[9] In another letter he advised that "you should also get rid of the bag that the money was in because it might have a chip."[10]

There is little in the documents about avoiding the phone or e-mail. In the seven letters, he made a single reference to a phone being monitored.[11] Given that these letters were written in 2010 and 2011 and all his communications appeared to be conducted by courier, it is reasonable to assume that everyone with whom he was corresponding was already aware of these risks and thus there was no need to address it explicitly.

In addition to SIGINT, Bin Ladin was concerned about HUMINT. It is clear that he worried not only about "spies," but also about Iranian and Pakistani intelligence, and locals in general. When advising that the "brothers" leave Waziristan, he recommended that they should go to Afghanistan's Kunar Province because of "its rougher terrain; too many mountains, rivers, and

trees that can accommodate hundreds of brothers without being spotted by the enemy [aircraft]," but continued to caution that it would not protect them from "spies."[12] Thus, while his more immediate concern was aircraft, he made it clear that nowhere was safe from spies.

He also warned against possible infiltrations by Iranian intelligence: "since the Iranians are not to be trusted, then it is possible that they may plant chips in some of the released people's

"Bin Ladin devised what may be termed as the 'art of clandestine courier delivery.'"

belongings."[13] He expressed similar concerns about Pakistani intelligence and provided specific guidance on how to avoid drawing their attention during movement.[14] When providing guidance on how to meet with journalists, he warned that they may be "involuntarily monitored."[15] Finally, realizing that any meeting or chance encounter increased the risk of compromise, he advised that "you arrange homes for them on the outskirts of the city, to distance them from the people, which reduces the security dangers."[16]

Bin Ladin's OPSEC Guidance
Given these concerns, Bin Ladin employed various security measures to minimize the risk of detection. He relied on couriers for all his correspondence, directing Shaykh Mahmud in one letter to "remind your deputies that all communication with others should be done through letters."[17] Letters were then hand carried on electronic

3 Many of the letters are unsigned, so it is difficult to assess with certainty the author's identify in each letter, but with reasonable confidence it can be assessed that six of the letters were written by Bin Ladin and a seventh is likely authored by either Bin Ladin or `Atiyya.
4 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000019, p. 4.
5 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000015, p. 6.

6 Ibid., p. 3.
7 Ibid., pp. 4-6.
8 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000019, p. 30.
9 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000015, p. 4.
10 Ibid., p. 6.
11 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000019, p. 41.

12 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000015, p. 2.
13 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000019, p. 42.
14 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000015, p. 4; Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000016, p. 4; Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000019, p. 41. Also see Nelly Lahoud et al., *Letters from Abbottabad: Bin Ladin Sidelined?* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2012).
15 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000019, pp. 37-38.
16 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000010, p. 8.
17 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000015, p. 3.

storage devices, and when messages were delivered to the media they were to be saved on a "new [memory] card with nothing else on it" to prevent the media or intelligence officials from exploiting other files that might be on the storage device.[18] Bin Ladin must have assessed that the risk of couriers being compromised was far less than that of e-mail and phone correspondence. Meetings were to be avoided and "in general [activities] should be arranged through correspondence."[19]

Bin Ladin devised what may be termed as the "art of clandestine courier delivery." It started with Bin Ladin saving his letters or media statements on some sort of electronic storage device (such as a thumb drive or a memory card) before handing it to his courier who picked it up from his residence. His courier would then meet the courier of the intended recipient in a tunnel or at a "roofed section of a market," preferably on an overcast day to avoid U.S. surveillance.[20] The electronic media would then be handed to the recipient's courier who would, in turn, hand carry the message/electronic device to the intended recipient.

Bin Ladin provided clear guidance that each leader should not have more than one or two couriers and that each courier should meet with his counterpart no more than twice a week.[21] To minimize the likelihood of someone providing the locations to the United States or its allies, Bin Ladin stated that leaders "should know the locations of the brothers, but they should not know your locations, except for the carriers"[22] and that this applied to "every *amir*."[23] Finally, it was not uncommon for the recipient to be directed to delete the message after reading it.[24]

Bin Ladin was prudent enough to realize that some individuals were clearly not capable of following OPSEC measures and these individuals were a risk to themselves as well as to the organization. In one document, he advised that "there is a percentage of people who cannot do

> "Although the organization lost leaders who had to be replaced in a timely manner, Bin Ladin still required background checks on operatives, even if this slowed operational planning."

this, and those need to be handled in a different manner than others, and it may be better to provide them with an opportunity in the field."[25] Effectively, he recommended that individuals who pose a security risk to the organization go to fight in Afghanistan where the risk of a security blunder was less of a concern.

To reinforce the importance of practicing good OPSEC, he directed Shaykh Mahmud to "get an oath from the brothers that would include: 1) to hear and obey and conduct jihad to bring back the caliphate; 2) protect operational secrets; 3) protect the work [for which the brother] is responsible,

and provide advice to the leadership."[26] It is notable that one and a half of the points were dedicated to OPSEC measures and only a single point to ideology. Bin Ladin recognized that having ideologically committed members is of no use if they do not live long enough to act. Additionally, Bin Ladin directed Shaykh Mahmud to "take the oath even from brothers who gave it in the past," ensuring as part of their reaffirmation of loyalty that each brother understood the critical nature of security measures.[27]

Operational Work

Bin Ladin clearly recognized that practicing good operational security slowed al-Qa`ida's ability to act, but he calculated that it was a necessary trade-off. This caution applied not only to communications, but also to training and movement and is highlighted throughout his letters. In one letter, he stated "the other brother comes to you for necessary issues only, even if this slows down the work."[28] In another he advised "that [Hamza] stays low…and postpones training to another opportunity."[29] Later, in the same letter he stated that "you should know that arranging for a safe location after picking the suitable person takes time."[30]

Courier exchanges are inherently slow and an extremely inefficient way to communicate. Based on the limited number of letters that are currently declassified, it is difficult to determine how long this correspondence took. Even if located in the same region of Pakistan, it would likely take at least a week to send a message and receive a response as Bin Ladin gave clear guidance that "the [courier] should visit you no more than twice a week."[31]

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18 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000010, p. 3.

19 Ibid., p. 9.

20 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000015, p. 4; Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000019, pp. 38-42.

21 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000015, pp. 2-3.

22 Ibid., p. 3.

23 Ibid.

24 In Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000019, p. 40, when discussing an enclosed message for Shaykh Yunis, he wrote that it should be destroyed if it cannot be delivered securely. In Harmony Document SO-COM-2012-0000010, p. 7, he stated, "This [memory]

card contains a phone number of one of our brothers contained in the message for Hamza, so please do not copy the message for Hamza, and after Hamza copies the phone number on paper, destroy the [memory] card for fear of compromise."

25 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000010, p. 8. In the same letter, Bin Ladin said that "one of the most important security issues in the cities is controlling children. [The children] should not get out of the house except for extreme necessity like medical care, [we should] make sure to teach them the local language, and they should not get to the yard of the house without an adult who will control the volume of their voices. We, with the grace of Allah, have been adhering to these precautions for nine years. And I haven't heard that any of the brothers were arrested after the events while adhering to these precautions. Based on that, I would like you to inform the brothers that I think that anyone who can [not] adhere to the previous precautions should get out."

26 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-000003, pp. 1-2; Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000015, pp. 3-4.

27 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000015, p. 4.

28 Ibid., p. 3.

29 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000010, p. 7.

30 Ibid., p. 9.

31 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000015, p. 2.

Although the organization lost leaders who had to be replaced in a timely manner, Bin Ladin still required background checks on operatives, even if this slowed operational planning.[32] Further slowing the process, Bin Ladin insisted on personally approving the appointment of senior members. In one letter he directed Shaykh Mahmud to "send me the names of some qualified brothers, one of whom will become your deputy," implying that only Bin Ladin had the prerogative to make such appointments.[33]

Notwithstanding the significant intelligence effort focused on him after 9/11, Bin Ladin's compliance with strict security measures enabled him to evade detection for close to a decade. In the end, however, the United States was able to locate him, and during that time al-Qa`ida was incapable of mounting a significant attack against the United States.

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The Evidence of Jihadist Activity in Syria

By Brian Fishman

AS THE UNITED NATIONS prepares to expand its observer mission in Syria and the world community debates what that mission should aim to achieve, there is a parallel conversation taking place in the global jihadist community. Reflecting their position in other Arab Spring revolutions, the jihadists are vociferous in their demands that Bashar al-Assad's regime be overthrown. In contrast to the situation in other Arab Spring revolutions, in Syria jihadists linked to al-Qa`ida seem to have a militarily relevant capability on the ground. Proof of jihadist capability is elusive, but the combined weight of five indicators suggests that there is an active jihadist element operating on the ground in Syria. Its existence should be acknowledged for policy planning purposes.

First, a jihadist organization called Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) has been publicly declared in Syria and adopted al-Qa`ida-like tactics and modes of distributing propaganda.

Second, al-Qa`ida's *amir*, Ayman al-Zawahiri, has called for violence in Syria and jihadist intellectual leaders have echoed his message.

Third, important non-jihadist, Arab voices advocate privatized action to overthrow the al-Assad regime and have framed the struggle as opposition to "occupation," discourse that jihadists believe substantiates their calls for violent jihad, not just localized resistance to a corrupt government.

Fourth, there are already credible reports of foreign fighters attempting to infiltrate Syria, including a number reportedly affiliated with jihadist movements.

Fifth, al-Qa`ida has an active affiliate in neighboring Iraq that has longstanding logistical capabilities in Syria.

This confluence of factors suggesting that jihadists, and perhaps al-Qa`ida specifically, have the intent and capability to operate in the Syrian rebellion are unique among revolutionary Arab Spring states, but they do not mean that jihadists are likely to dominate the rebellion there. As in most conflicts where they operate, true jihadists almost certainly represent a small percentage of combatants in Syria and are unlikely to seize political control.

There is internal disagreement among jihadists about how to approach the conflict in Syria. Despite general consensus that supporting the uprising in Syria is a religious obligation, jihadists disagree over whether that assistance must go only to the small jihadist JN or if it can be provided to the ideologically compromised (from the jihadist point of view), but more powerful collection of militants known as the Free Syrian Army (FSA). They also disagree over whether jihadists have an obligation to travel to Syria to fight or should simply offer material support. These disagreements speak to the weakness of jihadists in the Syrian conflict versus the FSA, but also suggest that the violent jihadist cadre in Syria will turn on the FSA and other Syrian nationalists should the al-Assad regime fall.

The presence of jihadists worsens the situation in Syria: it is likely to both bolster the Syrian regime politically and keep the opposition divided. The presence of a jihadist element in the rebellion, however, should not be the conclusive factor determining whether the United States offers stronger political or materiel support to the rebellion. Al-Qa`ida and its allies are leeches on a more fundamental conflict in Syria—as they are in most regions where al-Qa`ida affiliates operate—and U.S. policy should be structured primarily to address those dynamics and the broader regional and geopolitical factors at play, especially the influence of Iran.

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32 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000016, p. 5. Additionally, he emphasized the importance of security when looking for the ideal traits in Harmony Document SOCOM-20012-0000019, p. 40: "and that he should be secretive even from his family and close friends, well-mannered, quiet, patient, aware, knowledgeable of the enemy tricks, and able to stay away from his family if that becomes risky."

33 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000019, p. 31.

Evidence of Jihadists in Syria: Five Factors

1. Jabhat al-Nusra: Al-Qa`ida's Ally in Syria?
On January 24, 2012, approximately nine months after the Syrian rebellion began, a jihadist group called Jabhat al-Nusra announced its presence in Syria.[1] Utilizing typical jihadist iconography and propaganda distribution mechanisms, JN declared war on Bashar al-Assad's autocratic regime, but also excoriated Western, Turkish, and Arab League intervention in Syria, thereby contradicting calls from leading Syrian activists, including those associated with the FSA, for international assistance.[2] The group has been particularly harsh on the UN's efforts to produce a cease-fire in Syria, arguing that the plan simply offered the al-Assad regime a fig leaf for continuing to attack the Syrian rebels.[3] Indeed, rather than a war of liberation from an autocratic government, JN framed the fight against al-Assad in explicitly sectarian terms, urging Sunni jihadists to wage war on the Syrian regime because the ruling class are predominately from a Shi`a sect known as Alawites:

> ...any sane people can feel the Iranian efforts in the previous years, side by side with this [al-Assad] regime, to spread the Safavid ideology in this blessed land in order to restore the Persian Empire. The Levant is the lungs of this Iranian project.[4]

JN has claimed credit for two suicide attacks in Aleppo on February 10, 2012; suicide strikes against a police building and the Syrian Air Force's intelligence headquarters on March 17, 2012; a suicide attack on a Syrian military unit supposedly responsible for a massacre in the town of al-Latamina on April 20, 2012; a bombing at the Iranian Cultural Center in Damascus on April 24, 2012; a suicide attack near an Alawite mosque in the Maydan neighborhood of Damascus on April 27, 2012; and a series of attempted assassinations against Syrian officials primarily utilizing so-called "sticky" bombs affixed to vehicles.[5] They notably did not declare responsibility for reported suicide attacks in Damascus on December 22, 2011, a month before the group was formally announced.[6]

JN has not claimed credit for the May 10, 2012, suicide attack that appeared to target the Palestine Branch Military Intelligence office in Damascus.[7] Indeed, the group's media wing has disavowed a crude video falsely claiming responsibility for the attack.[8] Importantly, however, that statement disavowed the false statement of responsibility, not the attack itself, an indication that the media wing of the group is simply unaware of operations.

JN's propaganda is laced with typical jihadist rhetoric, but also makes broader appeals to potential recruits. JN's high-quality, 45-minute video claiming responsibility for the Aleppo strikes explained that the attack's purpose was to avenge the "free women of Syria," who it reported were under attack from the Syrian security services. In the video, a sobbing, *niqab*-wearing woman testified that five men from the Syrian Army broke into her house, killed her young son, burned her with cigarettes and then raped her. The video then cut to a man identified as Abu al-Bara al-Shami, who argued explicitly that young men cannot stand idly by while Muslim women in Syria are abused:

> I swear by God that our sisters in Homs called us for help. I have seen with my own eyes a sister, whose house was attacked by five of al-Assad's thugs...They raped her one after another and killed her boy. She has called out all Muslim young men for help. All young men, who follow the same path of mine, can not stand idly on the suffering of that sister.[9]

Jihadist appeals to masculinity are not new; indeed, JN's approach is reminiscent of early al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI) recruitment videos accusing U.S. troops of raping Iraqi women.[10] Such emotional appeals do not rely on jihadist ideology and should be understood as an all-hands-on-deck call for support. Thus, JN is walking a typically tricky jihadist intellectual tightrope: attempting to combine a broadly appealing recruitment pitch with hardline jihadist ideology that has far less appeal.

1 "Announcement of the Al Nusrah Front," al-Manarah al-Bayda Foundation for Media Production, January 24, 2012. For more on Jabhat al-Nusra's name, see Aaron Zelin, "Jabhat al-Nusrah and Jihad in Syria," *al-Wasat*, January 30, 2012.

2 "Aid Pledged to Syrian Opposition Groups," al-Jazira, April 2, 2012. This article primarily identifies the Free Syrian Army as the "Syrian opposition" because the FSA is most discussed by jihadists. Yet jihadists have similarly negative views of all other Syrian opposition groups, including the Syrian National Council and the Local Coordination Committees.

3 "Al-Nusrah Front: Has the Story of Kofi Annan and his Truce Reached You? A Truce, What A Truce?" Hanein Forums, May 6, 2012.

4 "Al-Manarah al-Bayda for Media Production Presents: Announcement of the Al Nusrah Front," Ansar al-Mujahidin Forum, January 24, 2012. For more on the jihadist distinction between *muqawama* (rebellion) and jihad, see Nelly Lahoud, *The Jihadis Path to Self Destruction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 165-182.

5 "Operation Against the Directorate of Air Security and the Department of Criminal Security in Damascus," al-Manarah al-Bayda Foundation for Media Production, March 20, 2012; "Al-Nusrah Front - Statement No. 2: Operations To Fulfill the Promise," Ansar al-Mujahidin Forum, April 29, 2012; "Al-Nusrah Front - Statement No. 3: A Dual Quality Operation," Ansar al-Mujahidin Forum, April 30, 2012; "Al-Nusrah Front - Statement No. 4: Operations of the True Promise," Ansar al-Mujahidin Forum, May 5, 2012; "Al-Nusrah Front - Statement No. 5: Operations to Fulfill the Promise," Ansar al-Mujahidin Forum, May 8, 2012; "Al-Nusrah Front - Statement No. 6: Operations to Fulfill the Promise," Ansar al-Mujahidin Forum, May 8, 2012. These releases are all available at www.jihadology.net.

6 "Twin Suicide Bombers Kill 27 in Syrian Capital," Associated Press, March 17, 2012; Kareem Fahim, "Syria Blames Al Qaeda After Bombs Kill Dozens in Damascus," *New York Times*, December 23, 2011.

7 Oliver Holmes and Mariam Karouny, "Syria Suicide Bombers Kill 55, Ceasefire in Tatters," Reuters, May 10, 2012.

8 "Al-Nusrah Front - Statement No. 8: Notification Regarding the Fabricated Palestine Branch Attributed to Jabhat al-Nusrah," Ansar al-Mujahidin Forum, May 14, 2012.

9 "Raid to Avenge the Free Women of Syria," al-Manarah al-Bayda Foundation for Media Production, February 26, 2012.

10 Al-Qa`ida in Iraq arguably focused more on the "threat" of U.S. troops to Muslim women than it did on the photographs of abusive behavior at Abu Ghurayb prison. One incident in particular, the rape and murder of a 14-year-old Iraqi girl named Abeer al-Janabi by U.S. soldiers, was highlighted extensively. That incident had a lasting impact. Tarek Mehanna, a U.S. citizen convicted of conspiring to provide material support to al-Qa`ida, referenced al-Janabi twice in his sentencing statement. See Glenn Greenwald, "The Real Criminals in the Tarek Mehanna Case," *Salon*, April 13, 2012.

Jihadist supporters online now celebrate JN, but it is unclear how much support the group has inside Syria. The group's second major propaganda release was a blurry video of an unnamed man in a well-attended mosque calling for sectarian violence while waving a rifle.[11] These images seem designed to illustrate that JN has popular support in Syria, but it is not clear that the video was necessarily shot there or that the speaker represents a broad movement.

2. Rhetorical Support for Jihad in Syria and Debate Over the Free Syrian Army

Whatever JN's actual support in Syria, the declaration of a jihadist front has catalyzed external devotees eager to support, or fight under, a "pure" banner of jihad, which is a concept deeply embedded in jihadist doctrine. In 1979, Abdallah Azzam urged most Muslims to support the Afghan mujahidin rather than Palestinian groups, because, as he saw it, "the Islamic flag being raised in Afghanistan is clear," meaning undistorted by nationalism.[12] Not surprisingly, jihadist rhetoric advocating support for violence in Syria has grown more strident and prominent since JN raised a "pure" banner.[13]

The most important jihadist statement supporting jihad in Syria was released in February 2012 by Ayman al-Zawahiri, al-Qa`ida's new *amir*. In it, he demanded that "every Muslim and every free and honest person in Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon to rise and help their brothers in Syria with everything they have and can do."[14] The

statement, coming on the heels of JN's public announcement, was much more aggressive than a July 2011 statement that endorsed the overthrow of al-Assad, but refrained from calling for jihadists to join the fight.[15]

Al-Zawahiri's statement regarding Syria was not totally unprecedented: he also urged jihadists near Libya to assist in the overthrow of Mu`ammar Qadhafi.[16] But the al-Qa`ida leader's message regarding Syria carries more weight for a number of reasons: the existence of a declared jihadist faction; the fact that AQI or the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI)

> "There is no smoking gun illustrating al-Qa`ida's presence in the Syrian insurgency, but a prudent assessment of available facts suggests that jihadists are operating as a small component of a deeply varied rebel confederation."

is nearby, a condition not matched in other Arab Spring revolutions (Algeria-based al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb is less militarily capable); and because al-Zawahiri's statement coincides with a groundswell of jihadist rhetorical support for the revolutionary movement in Syria.

A wide range of important jihadist intellectual leaders have urged Muslims to support the rebellion in Syria. Among the most important are the Jordanian Professor Akram Hijazi, Kuwaiti Shaykh Hamid al-Ali, the Palestinian Abu Qatada (now in London), Mauritanian Shaykh Abu Mundhir al-Shinqiti (a member of Minbar at-Tawhed w'al

Jihad Shura, a leading ideological guide for jihadists), and a leading Jordanian Salafist, Abu Muhammad al-Tahawi.[17]

Al-Shinqiti and al-Tahawi have been the most hawkish. Both have endorsed JN rather than the FSA because the former "are fighting under a clear Shari`a banner." Al-Tahawi has aggressively denounced more dovish jihadist thinkers, especially the London-based Abu Basir al-Tartusi, who is notable because of his discordant opposition to jihadists traveling to Syria and even implied the revolution should not be weaponized.[18] Perhaps because of his vehemence, al-Tahawi's call for jihad has been credited in the Arab press with motivating the first trickle of jihadists toward Syria.[19]

The condemnation may have influenced al-Tartusi himself, who has now apparently joined the fight in Syria. A video posted on YouTube on May 11, 2012, purportedly shows al-Tartusi in Syria among a group of young men, some of whom are carrying weapons.[20] It is not clear if al-Tartusi is working with JN, which he has criticized, or a faction of the FSA.

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11 "Call to Jihad," al-Manarah al-Bayda Foundation for Media Production, April 13, 2012.

12 See, for example, Abdallah Azzam, *Defense of Muslim Lands: The First Obligation After Iman*, 1979, available on jihadist web forums.

13 For another reference to this, see Abu Muhammad al-Tahawi, "Achieving Victory by Supporting the al-Nusrah Front," al-Ma'sadah Media Establishment, March 13, 2012. It reads: "...after the banner is raised and the groups start to differ among themselves, they [jihadists] can never stand under the banners of paganism or any other banners considered to be the by-products of the Sykes-Picot borders. They have risen to seek what God has in store for them to make the religion of God prevail. They would never do that just to answer the call to paganism."

14 Ayman al-Zawahiri, "O Lions of the Levant, March Forward," al-Sahab, February 12, 2012. Al-Zawahiri's direct reference to supporters in countries neighboring Syria should be understood as pragmatic, but also con-

sistent with jihadist doctrine that calls for Muslims in countries surrounding Muslim land under occupation to respond first. See, for example, Azzam.

15 Ayman al-Zawahiri, "The Glory of the East Begins in Damascus," al-Sahab, July 27, 2011.

16 Ayman al-Zawahiri, "The Sixth Episode: Message of Hope and Glad Tidings to Our People in Egypt; The Battle of the Koran," al-Sahab, May 21, 2011.

17 Hamid al-Ali, "Covenant of Jihad in the Land of the Levant," www.h-alali.net, February 19, 2012; Hamid al-Ali, "To Keep in Mind Before Waging Jihad in the Holy Land," www.h-alali.net, February 11, 2012; Akram Hijazi, "The Syrian Revolution and Paths to Internationalization: The Virgin of Jihad, Part 3," al-Moraqeb, February 28, 2012; Akram Hijazi, "The Syrian Revolution and Paths to Internationalization: Arming the Revolution, Part 4," al-Moraqeb, March 15, 2012; Abu Mundhir al-Shinqiti, "Response to Question: With Which Group Should We Fight in Syria? Should We Set Out for Jihad Without Parental or Creditors' Permission?" www.tawhed.ws, March 17, 2012; Abu Muhammad al-Tahawi, "Achieving Victory by Supporting the al-Nusrah Front," al-Ma'sadah Media Establishment, March 13, 2012.

18 Al-Shinqiti; Abu Basir al-Tartusi, "Are You in Favor of the Arab Mujahidin's Entry to Syria? The Answer Is Given by Shaykh Abu-Basir Al-Tartusi," Hanein Forums, February 14, 2012; Abu Basir al-Tartusi, "Before My Concerns Come True, I Refer to a Number of Issue," www.abubaseer.bizland.com, February 28, 2012. For more on Abu Mundhir al-Shinqiti, see Joas Wagemakers, "Protecting Jihad: The Sharia Council of Minbar al-Tawhid w'al Jihad," *Middle East Policy* (Summer 2010).

19 Tamer al-Samadi, "Jordan's Jihadists Divided Over Jihad in Syria," *al-Hayat*, February 17, 2012.

20 "Heading to Jihad in Syria," available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgihhPIECag.

Indeed, the most important debate among jihadists is how they should interact with the FSA.[21] No major voices advocate immediate war against the FSA, but there is widespread concern about the FSA's nationalist approach and willingness to collaborate with international actors that jihadists disdain. Jihadists seem willing to let the FSA work for now, perhaps because of AQI's hard lessons at the hands of Sunni tribes and the success of the multifaceted Arab Spring movements overthrowing governments.[22] As Hamid al-Ali put it, "Jihad affirms that all disagreements and divergence in concepts, policies, and priorities that may weaken jihad shall be postponed until after the toppling of the regime."[23] In other words, jihadists should not oppose the FSA while al-Assad stands. Afterwards is a different story.[24]

3. Revolution as the Struggle Against Occupation
The fight in Syria has narrowed the rhetorical gap between jihadists and Arab regimes that want to see al-Assad deposed, especially in Saudi Arabia. Jihadists reject the legitimacy of Arab governments and Western authorities, but they nonetheless often repeat statements by "corrupt" leaders if they substantiate jihadist views. On February

25, 2012, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal called the al-Assad regime an "occupying force." The argument was widely reported in Arab media, welcomed heartily by the FSA, and subsequently referenced in jihadist geopolitical analysis.[25] Two weeks later, the Saudi Mufti `Abd al-`Aziz al-Shaykh said that "it is the duty of every Muslim to assist the Syrian people, according to his abilities...Anyone who can do so must wage jihad against [the Alawis] with his soul [or] with money, and those who cannot, must at least support [the Syrians] with words..."[26]

The question of whether Syria is "occupied" is an important one for jihadists. A key reason that Abu Basir al-Tartusi opposed jihadist intervention in Syria is that he claimed it is not under foreign occupation, a condition that would trigger ideological support for jihad. Jihadist advocates of violence in Syria, echoing language used by Saudi officials, reject that view, largely because al-Assad's regime is Shi`a/Alawite and backed by Iran.[27] The shared sectarianism of jihadist and Arab discourse on Syria is problematic because it reinforces the trend from Iraq and is now echoed by jihadist groups in Lebanon as well. Jihadists in Iraq have been trying to unleash sectarianism across the northern Middle East since 2003, and now Sunni-dominated governments reinforce their rhetoric.

Among Arab states, Saudi Arabia has taken the most hawkish line toward the al-Assad regime, driven by geopolitical concerns regarding Iran. The confluence of Saudi and jihadist interests in Syria is partial—the Saudis support the FSA unabashedly—but it raises the worrisome possibility that the Saudis may instrumentalize jihadists for strategic purposes. This would bolster jihadists going forward and reflects the

incomplete commitment of countries such as Saudi Arabia to minimize the sociopolitical movement that sustains al-Qa`ida.

4. Foreign Fighters in Syria
U.S. intelligence officials say that few foreign fighters have been identified in Syria, but several accounts from journalists suggest that fighters from Syria's neighbors and further afield are joining the fight. Most of these fighters are unlikely to join an al-Qa`ida-style campaign to overturn the international system: traveling to assist in a rebellion

> "The presence of jihadists worsens the situation in Syria: it is likely to both bolster the Syrian regime politically and keep the opposition divided."

against al-Assad does not necessarily indicate commitment to al-Qa`ida's worldview. Yet jihadists linked to al-Qa`ida have capitalized extensively on foreign fighter networks in recent years, and the growing reports of foreign fighters attempting to enter Syria raise the risk of jihadist blowback from this conflict in the future.[28]

Jordan is potentially an important staging area for foreigners recruited into Syria, not only because of its proximity, but also the presence of leading figures, such as Abu Muhammad al-Tahawi, advocating emigration to the Syrian battlefield. Senior jihadist figures in Jordan say that at least 10 Jordanian jihadists have been imprisoned for trying to travel to Syria.[29]

In Iraq, a range of tribal groups and militant networks have offered support to the Syrian revolutionaries, although much of that aid has likely matriculated to elements of the FSA

21 A related question is how the FSA will treat jihadists. To date, the FSA seems wary of jihadist participation in the Syrian rebellion, cognizant that a jihadist presence may complicate relations with the international community. Nonetheless, some FSA commanders suggest provocatively that if the international community does not assist the Syrian rebellion, some FSA commanders may tolerate jihadists. See Liz Sly, "Fears of Extremism Taking Hold in Syria," *Washington Post,* April 22, 2012.
22 See, for example, Abu al-Fadl Madi, "The Lessons of Iraq in Syria," Hanein Forums, January 10, 2012.
23 Al-Ali, "Covenant of Jihad in the Land of the Levant."
24 Jihadist web chatter also generally opposes the FSA but calls for short-term accommodation. For example, see: "To the Al-Nusrah Front," Ansar al-Mujahidin Forum, February 10, 2012; Nasir al-Qa`ida, "Contemplations on the Stance of Supporters Toward the al-Nusrah Front and the Free Syrian Army," Hanein Forums, May 6, 2012. The latter explicitly references former Islamic State of Iraq Minister of War Abu Hamza al-Muhajir, who reportedly noted that many of the ISI's commanders were former Iraqi Army officers. For its part, the FSA has tried to distance itself from al-Qa`ida, most likely in an effort to maintain international legitimacy, which is a concept that jihadists implicitly reject. See Faris al-Layl, "Free Syrian Army - Al-Faruq Brigade Disavows Al-Qa'ida, Congratulates Sarkozy, His Government, UK, Spain," Ana al-Muslm Network, March 1, 2012.

25 Bassel Oudat, "Resilience on the Front Line," *al-Ahram Weekly,* March 1-7, 2012; Nadia al-Turki, "Syrian Opposition Praises Saudi FM Position," *Asharq al-Awsat,* February 25, 2012; Akram Hijazi, "The Syrian Revolution and Paths to Internationalization: Arming the Revolution, Part 4," al-Moraqeb, March 15, 2012.
26 "Arab Clerics Call to Kill Assad, Fight His 'Illegitimate' Regime," Middle East Media Research Institute, March 23, 2012.
27 Hamid al-Ali, "Bear it in Mind Before Conducting Jihad in the Holy Land," www.h-alali.net, February 11, 2012.

28 For more on the history of jihadist-linked foreign fighters, see Thomas Hegghammer, "The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters: Islam and the Globalization of Jihad," *International Security* 35:3 (2010/2011).
29 Tamer al-Samadi, "Jordan's Jihadists Divided Over Jihad in Syria," *al-Hayat,* February 17, 2012.

rather than jihadists.[30] Indeed, at least one Iraqi in Syria has frankly described participating in the Anbar Awakening fight against al-Qa`ida's ISI.[31] One explicit call for violence in Syria—"taking up weapons against this [Syrian] regime, and seeking to bring it down are obligatory by virtue of the Islamic Shari`a"—comes from the Islamic Front for Iraqi Resistance, an Iraqi Sunni nationalist group, not a jihadist group.[32]

Libyan veterans of the fight against Mu`ammar Qadhafi are also reputed to be operating in Syria. Libyan opposition fighters have claimed that several of their compatriots have been killed in Syria, and there are reports of Libyan veterans prepping among the Syrian opposition in southern Turkey.[33] Nonetheless, the number of Libyans operating in Syria is likely small, and the supposed integration of Libyans with Syrian fighters in southern Turkey is a positive sign that these recruits are working with the FSA, not JN or other jihadist factions. The presence of Libyans in Syria is concerning to many because of the prevalence of Libyan jihadists among foreigners joining al-Qa`ida's ISI in 2007.[34] But the documented surge of Libyans to Iraq occurred over a narrow time period, which suggests some explanation for their mobilization more complex than general support for jihadist activism.[35] Moreover, the prevalence of jihadists within the Libyan uprising has often been exaggerated in American commentary, although it is certainly not baseless.[36]

The logistics networks that Libyan jihadists used to travel to Syria to enter Iraq are unlikely to be useful now. Most Libyan jihadists recorded in the Sinjar Records, a collection of foreign fighter personnel documents collected by the ISI for incoming fighters from August 2006 through August 2007, traveled first to Cairo and then by air directly to Damascus, a route easily constrained by Syrian security infrastructure if they so desire (an indication that in 2007, they did not).[37] A smaller number traveled from Egypt into Jordan for travel by land into Syria, a route theoretically useful today considering the hints of Jordanian networks intent on fighting the Syrian regime. Yet the Jordanian security infrastructure is quite strong and has already arrested would-be foreign fighters headed to Syria. Thus, most Libyan jihadists intent on fighting in Syria (or Iraq) today are likely to embed themselves among semi officially-sanctioned FSA-supporters traveling to southern Turkey or Lebanon.[38]

5. Al-Qa`ida's Existing Networks

A key reason that the al-Qa`ida threat in Syria is more worrisome than in other Arab Spring rebellions is the plausible presence of active al-Qa`ida-linked networks supported by a resilient, albeit weakened, al-Qa`ida organization in Iraq.

Al-Qa`ida's supporters in the ISI have utilized extensive logistical networks in Syria to transport foreign fighters into Iraq for nearly a decade, sometimes with the apparent assistance of elements of the Syrian state.[39] The Sinjar Records suggest a complex web of smugglers moving jihadists in, through, and out of

Syria.[40] U.S. forces even raided Syrian territory in 2008 to kill Abu Ghadiyah, the leader of one of the most important smuggling networks.[41] Diplomats report "dozens" of "jihadists" crossing into Syria from Iraq, a number that prudence dictates likely includes at least some from al-Qa`ida's ISI.

The ISI is much diminished from its strongest level in early 2007, but the group has remained a capable terrorist organization in Iraq and continued to import manpower through Syria until late 2010 at least, despite increasing its reliance on local fighters.[42] The ISI's smuggling routes are not unidirectional. The Sinjar Records indicate that the ISI moved fighters out of Iraq through Syria and it is likely capable of utilizing remaining networks to funnel fighters into Syria today, as suggested by U.S. Director of National Intelligence James Clapper in Congressional testimony.[43] Still, many of the smuggling networks used by the ISI are essentially criminal gangs, not dedicated jihadists—so while the ISI likely does have functional networks in Syria today, they are almost certainly limited to a sub-group of the ISI's overall Syrian facilitation apparatus revealed in the Sinjar Records.

ISI support for violence in Syria is not likely to take the form of large numbers of fighters, most of whom would be unfamiliar with the terrain or political contours of the conflict. The most worrisome operational support the ISI could supply are trainers and bombmakers, which creates an intelligence problem for governments, journalists, and academics trying to measure the jihadist presence in the conflict. These fighters are less likely to be identified on the front lines or wind up dead or wounded in hospitals—both

30 Tim Arango and Duraid Adnan, "For Iraqis, Aid To Syrians Repays a Debt," *New York Times,* February 12, 2012; Khalid al-Taie, "Iraqi Fighters, Arms Trickle into Syria as Violence Grows," Reuters, February 14, 2012.

31 Ken Segupta, "Syria's Sectarian War Goes International as Foreign Fighters Pour Into Country," *Independent,* February 20, 2012.

32 "Statement by the Political Bureau of JAMI: Performing Jihad in Syria is Obligatory," al-Boraq Islamic Network, March 14, 2012.

33 Borzou Daraghi, "Libya 'Cannot Stop' Fighters from Joining Syrian Rebels," *Financial Times,* February 9, 2012.

34 Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, *Al-Qa`ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2007).

35 Ibid.

36 Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, "The Enemies of our Enemy," *Foreign Policy,* March 30, 2011.

37 Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman, "Becoming a Foreign Fighter: A Second Look at the Sinjar Records," in Brian Fishman ed., *Bombers, Bank Accounts, and Bleedout: al-Qa`ida's Road In and Out of Iraq* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2008).

38 There is anecdotal evidence that North African foreign fighter flows shifted between the time that the Sinjar Records were captured and the Arab Spring. Whereas Tunisian fighters listed in the Sinjar Records tended to cross Libya before flying to Damascus from Cairo, at least one group of Tunisian fighters in 2008 crossed north into Europe and traveled to Syria via Turkey. For more, see Brian Fishman, "Redefining the Islamic State: The Fall and Rise of al-Qaeda in Iraq," The New America Foundation, August 18, 2011.

39 Ibid.

40 Felter and Fishman, "Becoming a Foreign Fighter: A Second Look at the Sinjar Records."

41 Greg Miller and Josh Meyer, "U.S. Officials Say Raid Killed al-Qa'ida Figure," *Los Angeles Times,* October 28, 2008.

42 Lara Jakes and Qassim Abdul-Zahra, "More Foreign Fighters Seen Slipping Into Iraq," Associated Press, December 5, 2010.

43 Greg Miller "Al-Qa'ida Infiltrating Syrian Opposition, U.S. Officials Say," *Washington Post,* February 16, 2012; Sahar Issa, "Iraq Officials: Violence Drops as al-Qaida Group Moves to Syria," McClatchy Newspapers, February 20, 2012.

places where intelligence officers and journalists will look for their presence. Outside investigators are not likely to have access to places where jihadist force multipliers are most prone to operate: in jihadist-specific safe houses, training locals to do the actual fighting. The lack of direct evidence of

> **"Most Libyan jihadists intent on fighting in Syria (or Iraq) today are likely to embed themselves among semi officially-sanctioned FSA-supporters traveling to southern Turkey or Lebanon."**

ISI fighters in Syria is certainly not an indication that they are operating there, but neither is it exculpatory evidence that they are not. Terrorism is about small groups creating outsized impact.

The ISI is reasonably situated operationally to expand activities to Syria, but it is extremely well prepared to support jihadists in Syria intellectually and with propaganda. Like most jihadists, the ISI rejects the legitimacy of the border dividing Syria from Iraq because it is the product of the 1916 Sykes-Picot treaty between Britain and France. The ISI also has a long record of opposition to Shi`a political influence in Iraq, which it has framed as the product of unjust Iranian influence. A similar narrative now dominates jihadist discourse about Syria, where the presence of Alawites, a Syrian minority Shi`a sect, in authority positions may make the argument more compelling for jihadists. (Importantly, this narrative also dominates discourse from the Abdallah Azzam Brigades, a Lebanese jihadist group of undetermined strength with close ties to al-Qa`ida's formal propaganda network.[44])

ISI propaganda, always highly sectarian, returned to that theme in the weeks after JN was announced and Ayman al-Zawahiri voiced his support for violence in Syria. Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, the ISI's spokesman, drew directly on the intellectual lineage of Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi to outline his vision of a sectarian war with the same combatants from Iraq to Lebanon:

> …we warn the Sunnis on earth in general, particularly in Iraq and the Levant, that the rejectionists [Shi`a] are preparing to wage a comprehensive war against them, and that the war has become imminent…The war is in fact being waged, as you find the Nusayris [Alawites] in the Levant torturing the Sunnis. Hizb Allah was not satisfied with their war in Lebanon, so they sent their snipers and criminals to Syria to shed the blood of its defenseless people…[the Mahdi] Army came as well, but it did not quench their thirst for the blood of Sunnis in Iraq, and their militias are now crossing, by the dozens, to support the regime of Bashar, the dog of the Nusayris.[45]

Conclusions: A Real and Persistent Challenge

There is no smoking gun illustrating al-Qa`ida's presence in the Syrian insurgency, but a prudent assessment of available facts suggests that jihadists are operating as a small component of a deeply varied rebel confederation.[46] Moreover, some of those jihadists likely have links with the ISI in neighboring Iraq. Whatever the facts on the ground, jihadist supporters interpret the public declarations by JN as evidence that al-Qa`ida's allies are present in the Syrian insurgency. Even if jihadist operations in Syria are limited in scope, the jihadist online community believes the jihadist presence there is part of al-Qa`ida's global effort against the West and part of a transnational sectarian war.

The presence of small numbers of jihadists does not discredit the purpose of the Syrian uprising, which at its core is a struggle against autocracy. Yet the presence of jihadists in Syria likely works to the advantage of Bashar al-Assad despite their determined opposition to him. The reason is that jihadists' political impact is likely to outweigh their operational capability. JN's military influence is unlikely to shift the balance between the Syrian regime and the rebel alliance, but the specter of jihadists in Syria is likely to bolster al-Assad's efforts to maintain loyalty among the security services.

Al-Assad will utilize the threat of jihadist sectarian attacks to fortify solidarity for the regime among Alawites and Christians, who may be fearful that if the regime crumbles they will become targets of jihadists regardless of whether they defect from the regime now and support the rebellion more broadly.[47]

Al-Assad's ability to manipulate the presence of jihadists in Syria to his benefit has raised the possibility that the entire jihadist enterprise there is a fabrication. Certainly, al-Assad is not above deception, and the forged JN statement claiming responsibility for the May 10, 2012, suicide bombing in Damascus is proof that observers must be careful not to accept information at face value. Nonetheless, the evidence that jihadists are active in Syria is persuasive. The sectarian dynamic in Syria is attractive to jihadists. Recent tactics, including suicide attacks, are reminiscent of the ISI's in Iraq. The validated JN propaganda has been authenticated on jihadist forums. Jihadist intellectual leaders accept the group's validity and so do "lay-jihadists" communicating online. If the jihadist presence in Syria is fabricated, it has fooled the jihadists themselves.

Jihadists will also complicate matters for the FSA and other nationalist and Islamist revolutionaries. Syria's legitimate resistance groups cannot

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44 Abdallah Azzam Brigades, "Statement: Refuting the Fabrications of the Mukhabarat Administration, Part One," al-Shumukh Forum, March 16, 2012. Abdallah Azzam Brigades statements are released by the al-Fajr Media Network, the distribution mechanism for propaganda from al-Qa`ida central and closely linked organizations. Participation with al-Fajr is a key indicator

suggesting that the Abdallah Azzam Brigades has communications links with other jihadist groups, including, potentially, al-Qa`ida's core leadership.

45 Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, "Iraq, Iraq—O Sunni People," al-Furqan Media Establishment, February 24, 2012.

46 For more, see Nir Rosen, "Islamism and the Syrian Uprising," *Foreign Policy,* March 8, 2012.

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47 Ben Hubbard and Zeina Karam, "Assad Says He'll Keep on Fighting 'Terrorism,'" Associated Press, March 7, 2012. For reference, see Barry Posen, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict," in Michael Brown ed., *Ethnic Conflict and International Security* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 103-124.

control the jihadists. Jihadists are unlikely to support any negotiated solution in Syria—and may actively strategize to undermine cease-fire efforts, whether or not the main elements of the Syrian resistance supports them. The presence of jihadists in Syria is also likely to confound international efforts to aid legitimate elements of the rebel coalition.

Although regional and geostrategic factors are likely to play a more determinative role, the presence of jihadists will also impact the deployment of United Nations observers in Syria. Whether or not the international community sees the peacekeepers as positive for the regime or the Syrian resistance, they are likely to be targets of jihadist violence in Syria; jihadists will endeavor to extend and expand the conflict rather than work toward a negotiated solution. The threat from jihadists is also likely to compel cooperation between the United Nations and the Syrian regime, which is the only institution capable of providing security for observers. Over time, this will create a significant moral hazard for a United Nations mission in Syria.

Jihadists are not the most important actors in the Syrian rebellion, but their presence illustrates the challenges of policymaking when such groups are present. This is particularly true because jihadists can capitalize on circumstances and outcomes that would otherwise be beneficial for U.S. interests. In Syria, undermining the al-Assad regime would be useful for limiting Iranian influence, but it is likely to lead to a weakly governed Syria that jihadists can exploit over the long-run. Jihadist interest in Syria also raises the costs of direct international intervention. Not only may jihadists benefit from material assistance to rebel groups, but Western intervention in Syria will contribute, rightly or wrongly, to jihadist propaganda that frames politics in the Levant as a function of foreign powers.

Many U.S. allies in the Arab world are unlikely to weigh these factors like the United States, and this leads to a disconcerting willingness, especially in Saudi Arabia, to instrumentalize private Muslim fighters—among them

jihadists—as a means of projecting power in Syria and countering Iran. That technique backfired badly after the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan 25 years ago. Syria reinforces a central lesson from more than a decade of fighting al-Qa`ida: U.S. allies that instrumentalize religiously motivated fighters for national security purposes are unlikely to change that practice unless the basic strategic calculation that led them to do so in the first place changes. U.S. pressure and occasional terrorist attacks against regimes are insufficient. Although Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have both suffered greatly at the hand of jihadists, and challenged al-Qa`ida aggressively at various moments since 9/11, both allies are problematic. Over the long-run, both will foster the conditions that enable al-Qa`ida as often as they crack down on specific militants.

Syria is thus a good example of the kind of challenge jihadists will pose for U.S. policy in the coming era: rather than an overwhelming security challenge, jihadists are a nagging itch, attacking oppressors and innocents alike, complicating U.S. policymaking while at times pursuing complimentary intermediate goals, and tempting some Arab countries to instrumentalize their violence with the promise of direct action against geopolitical enemies. Jihadist activism in Syria looks something like jihadist activism in Afghanistan in the 1980s, when Arab states promoted war against the Soviet Union, or Algeria, Bosnia, and Chechnya in the 1990s, when veterans of Afghanistan flocked to fight and jihadist propagandists in the Arab world and the West called for jihad. Indeed, jihadist activism in Syria is very traditional in some ways—a flashback to an era that ended on September 11, 2001.

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The Arab Spring and its Influence on Al-Qa`ida

By Bruce Hoffman

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT terrorism related development in the past year has been the death of Usama bin Ladin as a result of a dramatic raid conducted by U.S. Navy SEAL commandos in Pakistan in May 2011. Equally as consequential for al-Qa`ida's waning fortunes has been the "Arab Spring," which since February 2011 has completely transformed the political landscape of the Middle East and North Africa. These two separate and unrelated developments have been widely heralded as signaling the demise, or at least the beginning of the end of al-Qa`ida.

Yet while Bin Ladin's death has inflicted a crushing blow on al-Qa`ida, it is not yet clear that it has necessarily been a lethal one. Similarly, while the mostly non-violent, mass protests of the Arab Spring were successful in overturning hated despots thus appearing to discredit al-Qa`ida's longstanding message that only violence and jihad could achieve the same ends, serious terrorist threats and challenges nonetheless remain, and perhaps have increased, across the region.

Accordingly, however much the core al-Qa`ida (al-Qa`ida central) has been weakened by Bin Ladin's killing and the effectiveness of U.S. drone attacks, the strength of key al-Qa`ida allies such as al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) is increasing. In addition, while the Arab Spring has arguably transformed governance across North Africa and the Middle East, it has had little effect on the periphery of that geographic expanse.

The effects of the Arab Spring in Yemen, for instance, have clearly benefited AQAP at the expense of the chronically weak central government in that country. AQAP in fact has been able to expand: seizing and controlling territory (according to some estimates, amounting to nearly half the country), gaining new adherents and supporters, and continuing to innovate tactically as it labors to extend its attack capabilities beyond the Arabian Peninsula. Although developments in Somalia

suggest that al-Shabab, another close al-Qa`ida ally, has suffered a critical setback in the capital, Mogadishu, the group nonetheless maintains a stranglehold over the southern third of the country where a terrible drought and famine threaten the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. Al-Shabab's recent declaration of a formal alliance with al-Qa`ida evidences that

> **"While Bin Ladin's death has inflicted a crushing blow on al-Qa`ida, it is not yet clear that it has necessarily been a lethal one."**

the movement's brand and overall message still has a strong resonance and attraction in at least some corners of the world. In Syria, the longer the civil war rages and the bloodshed, upheaval, and uncertainty continues, the greater the potential opportunities for al-Qa`ida. Indeed, the movement's fighters have effectively reversed the flow of the insurgent "rat line" that once existed to Iraq to establish a worrisome presence in Syria.

Meanwhile, the instability and disorders generated by the Arab Spring may create new opportunities for al-Qa`ida and its allies to regroup and reorganize. The intelligence and security services of those countries affected most profoundly by the months of protest and upheaval will likely remain less focused on al-Qa`ida and other transnational threats and more concerned with internal problems. Cooperation with their counterparts in the West and elsewhere may no longer be as popular or even tolerated by domestic opinion. Indeed, the number of failed or failing states could grow in the aftermath of the changes witnessed across North Africa and the Middle East in 2011.

Bin Ladin's killing, as previously noted, has prompted tremendous optimism about al-Qa`ida's continued longevity. Despite the temptation to declare victory, however, it should be kept in mind that al-Qa`ida's obituary

has often been written during the past decade. Moreover, history has shown decapitation alone to be a largely ineffective weapon, rarely producing a decisive end to the targeted terrorist movement. Accordingly, while Bin Ladin's killing has weakened al-Qa`ida severely, the death of one man alone may not necessarily alter completely the movement's fortunes.

Similarly, contrary to many predictions, the Arab Spring may not necessarily sound al-Qa`ida's death knell. First, al-Qa`ida is still strongest at the geographical periphery of the dramatic events of the past six months. Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen remain key al-Qa`ida operational environments and sanctuaries. In Yemen's case, rather than depriving al-Qa`ida of political space, the Arab Spring has created new opportunities in that country both for AQAP's expansion and consolidation of its recent gains.

Second, al-Qa`ida's core demographic has always been disenfranchised, disillusioned, and marginalized youth. There is no evidence that the potential pool of young "hot heads" to whom al-Qa`ida's message has always been directed has dissipated because of the Arab Spring. Moreover, it may likely grow in the future as impatience mounts and many who took to the streets find themselves excluded from or deprived of the political and economic benefits that the upheavals in their countries promised. The losers and disenchanted of the Arab Spring may thus provide a new reservoir of recruits for al-Qa`ida in the near future. In this respect, it can be argued that al-Qa`ida's strategy is not to compete with the stronger and better organized Muslim Brotherhood in these countries, but to hope to feed off its malcontents and thereby attract new recruits into its ranks.

It should also be remembered that no single revolution in the Middle East since Turkey in the 1920s has proven to be a force for moderation and democracy in the region. This already unimpressive track record is compounded by the multiple revolutions currently unfolding in various countries, each with different conditions and contexts that will likely prove difficult for the West to influence uniformly in any positive

manner. Historically, the West has had problems exercising its influence when there was one revolution in one country at a time. In today's complex and dynamic regional environment, any moderating influences may either prove impossible to exert or have no effect.

Finally, the likely fragmentation of the jihadist movement as a result of Bin Ladin's killing and core al-Qa`ida's weakening will doubtless present new challenges and may create different threats of varying magnitudes in different places—perhaps even simultaneously.

In this respect, counterterrorism authorities should be concerned that al-Qa`ida and/or the jihadist movement might seek to harness the same social networking tools that enabled the Arab Spring to mobilize persons quickly for demonstrations and protests. Social networking tools reportedly figured in the spread of the rioting and looting that convulsed London and other major British cities in August 2011. The Taliban have already created two Twitter sites (@alsomood and @alemarahweb) for publicity purposes, and al-Shabab continues to use Facebook as a radicalization and recruitment tool directed at young Somali-Americans in the United States. Last fall, al-Shabab also inaugurated its own Twitter site. These social networking tools may eventually also be used by terrorists to organize simultaneous swarming attacks in capital cities throughout the world.

Given the tragic events in Norway in July 2011 and Toulouse in March 2012, there is also the threat from lone wolves and aggrieved individuals who might be encouraged by al-Qa`ida and associated groups to carry out attacks on their own with the goal of flooding already stressed intelligence and law enforcement with "noise" that will consume attention and overwhelm security efforts. These lower-level incidents would thus be meant primarily to preoccupy and distract the authorities in hopes that a spectacular al-Qa`ida attack might therefore avoid detection and dramatically shatter complacency. Whether the Toulouse gunman is such a creation remains unclear. Yet the potential for lone individuals to have

tragic consequences has now been demonstrated in places as disparate as Texas (with the Fort Hood shootings in November 2009), London (the stabbing of British MP Stephen Timms by a 21-year-old university student), and more recently Norway and France.

In conclusion, history has shown that al-Qa`ida requires a physical sanctuary or safe haven. Indeed, this is why al-Qa`ida has invested so much of its energy in recent years to strengthening the capabilities of its allied, affiliated or associated movements in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia in particular—and over the past three years in Nigeria and surrounding West African countries as well.

Al-Qa`ida has thus created a networked transnational movement to ensure its survival. Rather than the single, monolithic entity of a decade ago, today there are several al-Qa`idas, not just one: each of which has different capabilities and presents different, often unique, challenges. This effectively negates a "one size fits all" strategy. Instead, countermeasures have to be tailored to the specific conditions and realities in each of those countries and regions where al-Qa`ida and its franchises have taken root and indeed have flourished.

At a time of successive international monetary crises, declining national budgets and a diminishing national will to be at war with terrorism, the implications of the movement's fragmentation are unclear and, as yet, cannot be prudently or safely discounted.

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Are Jihadist Groups Shifting Their Focus from the Far Enemy?

By Philip Mudd

MANY JIHADISTS IN the 1990s focused locally, with the bloody uprising in Algeria and the attacks in Egypt directed at President Hosni Mubarak's overthrow, rather than on "far enemy" targets that have been at the center of the spread of al-Qa`ida and affiliated groups. The incubator of the anti-Soviet campaign in Afghanistan, however, helped change jihadists' field of vision, and the later genius of al-Qa`ida stemmed not from the execution of its spectacular attacks on 9/11, but instead from its ability to use its operations against distant U.S. targets as a means to inspire a new network of like-minded militants around the world. Affiliates then broadened their horizons and embraced a view that attacking distant enemies should become a priority over strikes against local targets.

Today, media analyses commonly look to the decline of al-Qa`ida's core operators in the tribal areas of Pakistan as an operational matter, focusing on the importance of arrests, raids, and drone strikes that have gutted the organization so effectively. The decline of al-Qa`ida's ideological message, however, is more subtle, but there are indicators that the far enemy strategy may be waning. Although it is far too soon to make a definitive statement, this article speculates that the diffusion of the al-Qa`ida message, and the death of so many senior operatives, may indicate that jihadism is coming full circle: from local jihads in the 1990s to the al-Qa`ida internationalist wave of the 2000s back to groups that claim to inherit the internationalist mantle but act more locally.

Ideological Shift: From Global to Local

Jihadist groups around the world have suffered a number of leadership setbacks. Their overreaching tactics, which have caused thousands of Muslim civilian deaths, have reduced support for jihadist ideology in general and al-Qa`ida in particular.

There are now signs that jihadist ideology is coming full circle, as some al-Qa`ida affiliates shift back to more domestic issues of civil war and local Muslim rights, with a renewed focus on overthrowing local regimes with less attention paid to the United States or causes such as Palestine and Iraq. Such signs include the loss of AQAP's and al-Shabab's foreign-focused leadership; the criminality of al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM); the still-local focus of the Nigerian Islamist sect Boko Haram; the limited objectives of the Pakistani Taliban;[1] and the shift to more reactive statements from al-Qa`ida's central leadership.[2]

To start at the core, statements over the past year by al-Qa`ida's post-Bin Ladin leadership reflect a loss of ideological leadership that matches the group's severe operational setbacks. The backdrop, a decade ago, was an environment in which the United States and others battled to keep al-Qa`ida's leadership from maintaining a global voice via a steady stream of televised messages that ranged in substance from Palestine to Sudan to Iraq. Ayman al-Zawahiri, far from driving global jihadist thought, has been reduced to supporting uprisings with which he has little or no affiliation, and over which he has no influence, particularly since many of the new Arab revolutionaries reject al-Qa`ida's ideology. His remarks on Syria this year, for example, simply expressed post-facto support for the Syrian protesters; in a fight to remain relevant, he and other al-Qa`ida speakers are less interested in whether these new populists who are emerging reflect al-Qa`ida's ideology than whether they represent a swath of the population that al-Qa`ida cannot afford to ignore or alienate. The same ideology that appeared so threatening in the Arabian Peninsula and through North Africa and Southeast Asia just a decade ago is now an afterthought in every

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1 Although Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan was involved in the May 2010 plot to bomb Times Square in New York City, it has almost exclusively been focused on attacks inside Pakistan—although a number of its fighters are involved in cross-border fighting in Afghanistan.

2 There are, to be sure, embers in the movement that threaten to rejuvenate the internationalists; Lashkar-i-Tayyiba and Jemaah Islamiya's current incarnation (Jemaah Anshorut Tauhid) seem possible inheritors of al-Qa`ida's mantle since they enjoy residual local support.

revolution convulsing the Arab world and on Arab airwaves where broadcasts of al-Qa`ida leadership messages were once so prominent.

The recently released documents from Bin Ladin's Abbottabad compound indicate that Bin Ladin bemoaned the decline of al-Qa`ida's influence. As he reflected the rapid ascent of AQAP, the actions of the Pakistani Taliban, and the potential of al-Shabab, Bin Ladin appeared to understand the significance of al-Qa`ida's failure to capture the popular spike in support that vaulted the group to such prominence in popular opinion after 9/11. Recent Pew polling suggests that Bin Ladin was right to worry about the weak ideological foundations of al-Qa`ida: in polling from April-May 2012, only 13% of Pakistanis held favorable views of al-Qa`ida; in Jordan, support dropped significantly from 2010.[3] Bin Ladin's view of the state of his own organization's revolution was possibly more dire than that of many U.S. analysts.

As the al-Qa`ida ideology that once inspired a jihadist offensive around the world now slips to the defensive, the al-Qa`ida "affiliates," which appeared just a few years ago to represent the future beacons of the "far enemy" message, have shifted their attention from the global jihad. In Yemen, AQAP is engaged in a fight for Yemeni territory. After taking control of a town in Yemen in January 2012, an AQAP leader, Tariq al-Dhahab, claimed that "The Islamic Caliphate is coming...and it will be established."[4] His goal had less to do with the globalist vision of Anwar al-`Awlaqi than with a conventional insurgency. Even the recent AQAP plot in May 2012, dramatic as it was, may suggest as much about the importance of a sophisticated bombmaker (presumably the same technician who designed the failed Detroit airliner device) and his single-handed impact on anti-Western plots than it does about lingering internationalist intent within the group.[5]

Similarly, the successes in eliminating many of the foreign-focused jihadists among al-Shabab's senior ranks might have lessened, at least for now, the overseas threat from Somalia; the group, fighting for survival after its ouster from Mogadishu last year, has staged terrorist attacks in Somalia and surrounding countries, with less focus on more distant targets as they lose ground in their battles against domestic enemies. Recent al-Shabab threats surrounding the possible deportation of prominent extremist Abu Qatada from the United Kingdom to Jordan show there are still sparks of internationalism in the group, but these statements appear to reflect less an operational interest by al-Shabab's leadership than a simple echoing of press releases from al-Qa`ida in Pakistan.

The newest player, Boko Haram, has claimed contacts with and inspiration from al-Qa`ida affiliates, but the attacks by the group, and its public statements, reflect a more circumscribed vision. Most attacks strike local targets, such as churches and security installations, although a United Nations building was hit in August 2011. Boko Haram appears focused on the local priority of carving out an Islamic state in northern Nigeria (along with defending the rights of Nigerian Muslims), not on the global jihadist priority of the far enemy. Its affiliation with other jihadists across Africa might have given the group access to weapons and training, but the kind of ideological interaction with global jihadists who might broaden its target set—the interaction between al-Qa`ida and Jemaah Islamiya (JI), for example, that helped spawn the Jakarta and Bali attacks—does not appear to have occurred.

Furthermore, Boko Haram's al-Qa`ida claims, and the affiliation of al-Shabab with al-Qa`ida, may represent a more universal shift among jihadists from global to local concerns. These superficial al-Qa`ida affiliates may be adopting the al-Qa`ida brand name without absorbing the globalist ideology; over time, they may accelerate the fragmentation of al-Qa`ida's ideology by simply characterizing any local or Islamist cause they choose as

"al-Qa`ida." The al-Qa`ida name, then, might live on, even as the idea behind it blurs beyond recognition.

The slow emergence of new, post-revolutionary governments in the Middle East could easily accelerate this decline of globalism. Hardline Salafists in countries such as Tunisia and Egypt are already having to compete against much broader support for more mainline Islamists. These mainliners, such as Ennahda in Tunisia, will not hesitate to use force against al-Qa`ida-affiliated individuals or groups who harbor the illusion of returning to a caliphate by sponsoring violence. The struggle between the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafist politicians in Egypt shows that the most prominent future threat to hardliners might be Islamists at home, not a far enemy abroad. It is not hard to imagine Brotherhood-linked governments in the future pressed to use their security forces against more extreme elements.

Anti-Globalist Trend Not Irreversible

If an anti-globalist trend is emerging, it is not irreversible. The persistent threats of a return to global jihad in countries such as Indonesia and Pakistan retain the potential to resuscitate "far enemy" targeting because their globalist roots are deeper. Their leaders have had longstanding involvement in the past decades' rise of global jihad. Lashkar-i-Tayyiba founder Hafiz Saeed, for example, has an extensive association with the movement that is at the core of global jihadist ideology in Pakistan, and his rhetoric reflects his broad view of the group's goals. In April 2012, after the announcement of a $10 million reward for him by the United States, Hafiz Saeed remarked, "This is the same jihad which caused the USSR to break and now America is failing because of it. Analysts and journalists don't realise why America is failing, the only reason is jihad."[6] AQAP in early May 2012 reportedly attempted another airline strike, and al-Shabab still makes internationalist statements. Yet these groups' attention is primarily domestic; LeT, by contrast, has not shifted its targeting strategy away from India, and there is evidence that formerly Kashmiri-focused groups, like the LeT,

3 "On Anniversary of Bin Laden's Death, Little Backing of al Qaeda," Pew Research Center, April 30, 2012.

4 "Yemen Amends Immunity Law, Saleh Still Protected," *Asharq al-Awsat*, January 19, 2012.

5 Although AQAP remains a threat to the United States, the author finds it unlikely that it will be able to inherit the "al-Qa`ida central" mantle. AQAP's leadership, organization and global reach—in addition to its ability to

front leaders who can capture a global audience—pale in comparison to their ideological inspirers a decade ago.

6 Rana Tanveer, "Hafiz Saeed Calls for Jihad Against America," Agence France-Presse, April 6, 2012.

are becoming increasingly involved in al-Qa`ida-affiliated jihadist violence.[7] Similarly, Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi in Iraq, with his long background in the globalist movement, persisted in thinking about how to expand outside Iraq even as he was preoccupied with the raging fight inside the country. Leaders like him could recharge the revolution; al-Qa`ida's participation in Syria, now marginal, reflects their interest in finding new locales to continue the fight they fueled in Iraq.

In this vein, JI's alleged spiritual head, Abu Bakar Bashir, coming out of the decades of Islamist thought in Indonesia and the expansion of JI's vision during the past decade, still oversees an ideological war in which targets representing foreign powers or culture are a priority;[8] although Bashir has recently been imprisoned, many suspect that he still continues to control his movement from behind bars. The recent arrest in Pakistan of JI terrorist Umar Patek, a conspirator in terrorist attacks a decade ago, underscores the commitment of the group to maintain contacts with the jihadist ideologues in Pakistan's tribal areas who helped sponsor JI's attacks in 2002. His visit suggests continued commitment and cooperation among global jihadists today, even in the midst of the operational pressure that is crushing the core leadership in Pakistan. Indonesian security has severely damaged JI's infrastructure during the past decade, but persistent reports of plots against Western targets[9] and the breakup of a JI-linked training camp in Aceh in 2010[10] are reminders of the depth of al-Qa`ida sentiment remaining among Indonesian jihadists.

There are also other clues—based on the globalist actions and ambitions of jihadist groups during the past decade—about what indicators might foretell a more globalist shift by these groups. In Indonesia, for example, the government has been tough on the successors to JI and, in the past few years, on Bashir himself. Yet the post-9/11 political sensitivity of the fight in Indonesia, where Islamism has a prominent history, underscores the difficulty local politicians face in speaking out against Islamists who benefit from an undercurrent of public support. In Pakistan, the virulence of anti-Americanism and LeT-sponsored support for social programs, such as education and disaster relief, have given the jihadists an anchor in society. Like Hizb Allah in Lebanon, which used social services to vault from a terrorist group to a political player, they are not fringe elements. Finally, in Yemen, where the infusion of Saudi jihadists has energized a new incarnation of al-Qa`ida, Ansar al-Shari`a (Supporters of Islamic Law), the fact that the movement is holding ground in the heartland of al-Qa`ida's ideology suggests that long-term territorial gains might result in a return to globalist thinking.

None of this is to say that the more locally-focused groups pose no long-term globalist threat. Stability of leadership among these groups, steady contact with charismatic globalist ideologues, and access to new safe havens that allow for the growth of ideology (and more sophistication in plots) could give new jihadists an opportunity to embrace a vision that encompasses Western targets. More immediately, many of these groups, such as those in Nigeria, Somalia, and Yemen, are today forced to spend time and resources on winning battles at home, a problem core al-Qa`ida did not face as it spread its ideology from its safe haven in Afghanistan in the 1990s. If these groups gain ground, they may find both the time and the space to think bigger; they still perceive themselves as jihadist revolutionaries, and their commitment to spreading the cause might grow if they succeed in spreading their ideology at home.

International involvement in their countries, such as the international activities in Somalia in the mid-2000s that drove Somali youth to join militias fighting foreign troops, could also spur a change in how these groups think about broadening their target sets. In Nigeria, training or arms for Nigerian forces fighting in the north will capture Boko Haram's attention; statements by senior commanders in the U.S. military's Africa command about any U.S. support for Nigerian security elements will by definition bring the West into the narrative. German Chancellor Angela Merkel's recent statements about support for Nigeria in its fight against Boko Haram similarly might draw the Nigerian militants' attention.

Conclusion

The globalist agenda of al-Qa`ida's revolutionary movement broadened local jihadist agendas in the decade leading up to this century. The decline of al-Qa`ida, and the growing lack of legitimacy of its message from the heartlands of North Africa through the Arabian Peninsula, has left an ideological vacuum now filled by Arab revolutionaries and violent groups with local wars to wage. Without a group and leader who can ignite another al-Qa`ida-inspired wave, and with the loss of credibility of al-Qa`ida's message, the threat environment may be shifting again—from groups years ago driven by local agendas, to an al-Qa`ida revolutionary movement with a grand vision, and back again toward the local agenda. Although this does not necessarily portend a reduction in locally-directed jihadist violence, it could mean a decline in the globalist ideological threat to the West that drove national security policy after the 9/11 attacks.

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7 Also, during the Mumbai attack in November 2008, LeT militants attacked a Jewish site, a target that has nothing to do with Kashmir and directly reflects an absorption of "far enemy" targeting—concepts LeT would not have considered years ago.

8 Olivia Rondonuwu and Stuart Grudgings, "Analysis: Bali Attack Plot Shows Indonesia Terror Threat Evolving," Reuters, March 22, 2012.

9 Ibid.

10 Sidney Jones, "Terrorism: What Have We Learned from Aceh," *Tempo*, March 26, 2010; "FBI Says Bomb-Maker Umar Patek Met Osama bin Laden," AAP, April 20, 2012.

The Abbottabad Documents: Bin Ladin's Cautious Strategy in Yemen

By Gabriel Koehler-Derrick

JIHADISTS HAVE LONG discussed Yemen's suitability as a base for jihad. In this regard, recently declassified documents found in Usama bin Ladin's compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, reconfirm Yemen's importance, rather than provide a reinterpretation of its role in the global jihad.[1] While jihadist strategists have frequently debated the benefits of maintaining Yemen as a "reserve" force for the global jihad, or haven for jihadists,[2] others have argued that Yemen could be the vanguard of the global jihadist movement, citing innumerable conditions that they believe make success there more likely.[3] Irrespective of strategic orientation, both sides of this debate concur: conditions in Yemen are especially favorable for establishing an Islamic state through violent jihad.[4]

Of the 17 declassified documents released to the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, four have substantive sections on Yemen or al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).[5] Yet a review of these documents suggests that while AQAP's local leadership may have been optimistic about their chances for success, Usama bin Ladin had innumerable concerns about Yemen in general and AQAP in particular.[6] In a lengthy letter authored by Bin Ladin and written to Abu `Abd al-Rahman (known as `Atiyya), Bin Ladin noted,

> I reviewed your opinions regarding the issue of establishing an Islamic state before the elements of success have been completed and the issue of escalation in Yemen. I wanted to share with you my opinion on these two matters in order to establish a fruitful and constructive discussion, God willing. However, the matter is complex…To begin I would say that Yemen is the Arab country most ready for the establishment of an Islamic state, but this does not mean that the necessary fundamental elements for success for such a project have yet been realized.[7]

This article explores the question that results from this seemingly contradictory logic: if conditions in Yemen are so propitious for jihadists,

especially in the south,[8] what were the "necessary, fundamental elements" that Bin Ladin felt had yet to be realized in Yemen? First, the article will examine southern Yemen, where Bin Ladin saw conditions as being particularly favorable for `idad (preparations) and da`wa (outreach) but not expansive military operations. Second, it will inspect the motives behind Bin Ladin's cautious approach in Yemen, and discuss two aspects of the Iraqi experience which appear to have greatly influenced Bin Ladin's guidance regarding Yemen: tribal engagement and "conditions." The article concludes by briefly examining the gap between Bin Ladin's guidance and outcomes in Yemen and the possible implications of this divergence for AQAP's future.

The South

In marked contrast with the deliberate tone that characterized much of Bin Ladin's analysis of events in Yemen, there is a sense of opportunity with regards to developments in southern Yemen. "The situation in the south cannot sustain a truce," Bin Ladin wrote. "This is due to the people's intense anger toward the government and the huge amount of injustice inflicted on the people by the government, in addition to the mobilization conducted by al-Hiraak [Yemen's southern secessionist movement]."[9] In another demonstration of the south's importance, Bin Ladin advised Nasir al-Wahayshi, the leader of AQAP, that "it is crucial that one of the organization's prominent leaders be from the south."[10]

Escalating tensions in southern Yemen demonstrated the accuracy of Bin Ladin's assessment. The Hiraak al-Janubiya (Southern Movement) was founded in late 2006 when a group of

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2 Egyptian Islamic Jihad, among other groups throughout the 1990s, used Yemen largely as a safe haven for operatives. The idea of Yemen as a "reserve" is clearly referenced in Ayman al-Zawahiri's draft letter to the Egyptian people (Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000013) as well as by Bin Ladin in Harmony Documents SOCOM-2012-0000017 and SOCOM-2012-0000019. All Harmony documents mentioned in this article can be found at the Combating Terrorism Center's website.

3 Abu Mus`ab al-Suri is probably the most prominent strategically oriented jihadist to advance Yemen as a base for jihad. For a discussion of al-Suri's commentary, see Gabriel Koehler-Derrick ed., *A False Foundation? AQAP, Tribes and Ungoverned Spaces in Yemen* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2011), p. 20.

4 The pages of the documents received by the Combating Terrorism Center are not all numbered in the original Arabic version. The English translation numbers the pages to correspond to the content of each page of the Arabic version. As a result, most Arabic pages take more than a single page when translated, so the reader will find that the page number of the Arabic version is included on a separate line in the text of the English translation. To avoid confusion, this article refers to the page number in

the Arabic version so that the reader can easily find it in the English translation.

5 Of the Harmony documents from the Abbottabad compound, the following have the most substantive sections on Yemen or AQAP: Harmony Documents SOCOM-2012-0000003, SOCOM-2012-0000015, SOCOM-2012-0000016, and SOCOM-2012-0000019.

6 The vast majority of documents in the CTC's collection are either from Usama bin Ladin or Abu `Abd al-Rahman (`Atiyya). The lack of letters from Ayman al-Zawahiri is striking, although he is referred to throughout many of the documents, often by the *kunya* "Abu Muhammad." See, for example, Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000010, p. 2.

7 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000019, p. 18. The quality of the English translation provided to the CTC is not adequate throughout. When the translation was deemed inadequate, quotations cited in this article have either been amended or translated anew by Gabriel Koehler-Derrick with assistance from Muhammad al-`Ubaydi and Nelly Lahoud.

8 Ibid., p. 27.

9 Ibid., p. 27.

10 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000016, p. 4. AQAP had already written multiple statements focused on conditions in the south and southern grievances. See "Ila Ahlina fi al-Janub," *Muasasa al-Malahim*, May 15, 2009. While this document likely came after Bin Ladin's letter to `Atiyya, see also "Taqrir Ikhbari," *Sada al-Malahim* 15 (2010), in which AQAP claimed 49 operations against the government, 36 of which were in Abyan. Abu Mus`ab al-Suri maintained that Bin Ladin's operational interest in southern Yemen traced back to the 1990s. See Abu Mus`ab al-Suri, "Da`awa al-muqawima al-Islamiya al-`alaamiya," pp. 774-775.

retired southern military officers began to protest what they perceived as unfair discrepancies between northern and southern military pensions. From this modest beginning, a mass movement grew to encompass a wide range of grievances, ranging from concerns over land deals to northerners, unfair division of political patronage, distribution of revenues from Yemen's dwindling natural resources, and widespread complaints about corruption and impunity.[11] By the time Bin Ladin's letter to `Atiyya was written, likely sometime in late May 2010, a tense situation had developed between the `Ali `Abdullah Salih regime and a wide cross-section of southerners, including former allies of the regime, tribesmen, members of the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) government, as well as regular citizens disillusioned with unification. Even from his safe house in Pakistan, the documents suggest that Bin Ladin recognized the opportunities present in the smoldering tensions of southern Yemen:

> Large segments of the people in the south dare to revolt, prepare for armed confrontation, and fight against the government…We do not seek a truce in the south, as it goes against the people's movement to lift themselves from oppression. It will lead to us losing [the support] of those who oppose the government. We should not follow the lead [of the southern opposition] but we benefit from the tense atmosphere in spreading our call to the truth among the ranks of Muslims in the south.[12]

Despite the Hiraak's success and increasing southern dissatisfaction, it is important to note that by mid-2010 any comparison of the Hiraak and AQAP was necessarily a study in contrasts. AQAP was a small group with limited popular support, committed to political change through jihad alone; the Hiraak was a broad-based, largely non-violent popular movement, and an umbrella group for a mélange of different actors

with little in common beyond disgust for President Salih and a desire for increased autonomy or outright separation from northern Yemen.[13]

Bin Ladin's attention to events in the south appeared to coincide with the efforts of AQAP, which had already produced multiple videos targeting southern grievances.[14] Although not mentioned specifically in the documents, both sides likely viewed the governorate of Abyan, where numerous jihadist groups dating back to the early 1990s have been active, as a particularly promising location for operations.[15]

Lessons from Iraq: Tribes
Despite the fact that Bin Ladin viewed the south as ripe for exploitation by AQAP, his emphasis remained firmly on media efforts, `idad (preparations) and da`wa (outreach)—not increased military operations.[16] Why was Bin Ladin so cautious? The documents suggest that Bin Ladin's guidance for all of al-Qa`ida's "affiliates" were colored by the failures of al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI), particularly their attacks on the security forces, which led to the deaths of many tribesmen who had enlisted in the military after the Anbar Awakening. This preoccupation with not repeating the failures of Iraq was implicit in his analysis of the situation in Yemen, particularly regarding tribes:

> Not declaring a truce does not mean that we escalate against the government in the south and enter into an immediate fight against the military, as it would

not bring the desired outcome. This is because the sons of the northern tribes will be targeted in the fight [i.e., tribesmen who are members of the Yemeni military would inevitably go to fight in the south and would be attacked by AQAP]. Some of these tribesmen do not realize that the military are apostates. So the tribes will think that we increased the bloodshed, and people will talk among the tribes saying that al-Qa`ida kills a lot. This would distance many people from us and might lead to a tribal uprising to fight against us in revenge for their sons. This also means that we do not jump to establish an Islamic state in the south at the first chance of the government losing control in the south. The reason for this is what we mentioned earlier, that we are not yet ready to cover the people with the umbrella of Islamic rule.[17]

Bin Ladin's argument returned to yet another theme found throughout the documents released to the Combating Terrorism Center but not discussed in detail in *Letters from Abbottabad*: tribes and tribal relations.[18] While Bin Ladin made no mention of any specific Yemeni tribe in the documents, it is clear that he viewed the tribes as a key constituency in Yemen.

Across the documents pertaining to Yemen, Bin Ladin's guidance was consistent: AQAP must not repeat the mistakes of AQI. "The killing of a greater number of tribesmen generates shock amongst the tribes, and provokes them [to fight against us]," he wrote. "[It also] fosters strong motives to attack us out of a desire for revenge. Therefore the mujahidin must study their [own] operations and past efforts to identify mistakes and learn from them."[19]

AQI's strategic miscalculation in Iraq appeared all the more damning in Bin Ladin's eyes because he viewed tribesmen as generally predisposed toward supporting al-Qa`ida. "The

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11 The International Crisis Group's report, "Breaking Point? Yemen's Southern Question," provides an excellent overview of the Hiraak as well as a chronology of key events and actors.

12 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000019, p. 27.

13 "Breaking Point? Yemen's Southern Question," International Crisis Group, October 20, 2011, pp. 5-10, 15-21.

14 A statement by AQAP member Muhammad Ahmed bin Salih `Umayr al-Kalawi al-`Awlaqi in Abyan after an alleged drone strike in December 2009 focused specifically on southern grievances as well as more general discontent with former President Salih. The video can be found on YouTube under the title "Awl Dhuhur `alini li tandhim al-Qa`ida fi Abyan—Janub Yemen." Part of the statement was broadcast live on al-Jazira and al-`Awlaqi was killed shortly after making this speech. See his martyrdom video, "Shahid qasf al-ta'iraat al-Amrikiya `ala qaba'il al-yemen" (approximately minute four) for more appeals directed specifically to southerners.

15 By December 2010, AQAP had released a statement claiming 49 operations against the government, 36 of which were claimed to occur in Abyan. See "Taqrir Ikhbari."

16 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000016, p. 5.

17 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000019, p. 28.

18 Nelly Lahoud et al., *Letters from Abbottabad: Bin Ladin Sidelined?* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2012).

19 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000017, p. 2.

foreign enemy [the United States] invaded the country [Iraq] making a mistake and exposing its gross ignorance of the area and the nature of the Iraqi people, [this] stirred up the tribes and united them together [against the United States]; which led to the people supporting the mujahidin," Bin Ladin explained.[20] Bin Ladin seemed hopeful that the United States would repeat this strategic error in Yemen, noting,

> American pressure on the Yemeni government caused it to err in dealing with the tribes by bombarding their sons in al-Mahfad and Shabwa.[21] Continued pressure makes the government prone to bigger mistakes which [may] lead to the incitement of some tribes against the government. If the mujahidin treat the tribes well, the tribes will lean towards [supporting] the mujahidin.[22]

This discussion of past experiences suggests that Bin Ladin viewed tribes as a key constituency that could be won over by the mujahidin, especially when the tribes were attacked by the enemy. But these relations were not always so easy. An incomplete and mysterious letter that touched on many areas of strategy, including tribal relations, included a revealing passage that discussed some of the incompatibilities between tribal customs and the jihadists' interpretation of Shari`a: "Amongst us there were some committed mujahidin who upon returning to their countries [encountered] pre-Islamic [*jahiliyya*] tribal war, between their own tribe[s] and others, and some of them joined in, unable to resist their custom of blood feuds."[23]

Here tribal loyalties were presented as an almost deterministic force. Even devout mujahidin were helpless to resist the pull of tribal conflict and the "pre-Islamic" customs of their own people. While Bin Ladin's concern about tribal relations indicated that he did not believe that AQAP automatically enjoyed tribal support, he clearly viewed the tribes as al-Qa`ida's constituency to lose.[24]

Lessons from Iraq: "Conditions"
The dangers of accelerating operations before the proper conditions and resources are in place represent a second hard-learned lesson from Iraq that Bin Ladin did not want AQAP to repeat. The reader can almost sense the confusion of AQAP's leadership were they to have read the strategic guidance that immediately followed Bin Ladin's discussion of conditions in the south. Despite his favorable assessment of the south, rather than encouraging AQAP to seize a unique opportunity, Bin Ladin urged caution. In a stinging comparison, Bin Ladin suggested that were AQAP to prematurely expand their operations, they would fail exactly like the socialists had failed in southern Yemen years before, an error the Salih government stood precariously close to repeating. Bin Ladin warned,

> The reasons are that the people have needs and requirements, and the lack of these requirements is the main reason for their revolt against the ruler. We cannot provide for these needs in light of the battle and siege of the whole world against us [and attacking us] at this pace. It is human nature that they will align with whoever better meets their needs and requirements. The animosity of the world and its siege against the mujahidin is well known to the people, so no matter how much they love the mujahidin, the few amongst them will not stand beside the mujahidin under these circumstances.[25]

Bin Ladin's reasoning is consistent with commentary elsewhere in the documents on AQAP's lack of resources and preparedness to withstand pressure from the United States, Saudi Arabia,

and the Yemeni military itself.[26] In his eyes, given AQAP's lack of both money and men, expanded operations were irresponsible and risked precipitating a worse outcome than the status quo. "We should not begin to attempt to establish a government in Yemen, even if the people revolted against the government and toppled it, either in south Yemen or the rest of the country," Bin Ladin advised. "This is regardless of how bad the candidates to rule the government, because the outcome will be more damaging to Islam and Muslims, if we commence in a matter (establishing a state) without the elements of success. [And this] will put us in trouble with the people and will put the mujahidin there under enemy fire."[27]

Bin Ladin's response is consistent, almost to a fault, with his statements on operational sequencing and conditions elsewhere, and it is noteworthy that this commentary does not appear in the letter eventually addressed to Abu Basir (the *kunya* of Nasir al-Wahayshi).[28] It seems likely that `Atiyya spared al-Wahayshi the entirety of Bin Ladin's discussion of "escalation," which would have been a major disappointment given al-Wahayshi's ambitious plans for Yemen.[29]

The Head of the Snake
If Bin Ladin opposed escalation against the Yemeni state and viewed seizing territory as counterproductive even when he acknowledged promising signs for the mujahidin, especially in the south, where did he want AQAP to focus its efforts instead? Bin Ladin's strategic vision for Yemen matched the cautious tone of his discussion of developments in the south.[30] In Bin Ladin's mind, Yemen was to remain a source of manpower for

20 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000016, p. 12.
21 This is almost certainly a reference to raids which took place on December 17 in Abyan, Arhab and Sana`a and airstrikes in Shabwa which seem to have caused high collateral damage. See Karen DeYoung, "U.S. Helps Yemen in Attacks against Suspected al-Qaeda Targets," *Washington Post*, December 19, 2009; Sudarsan Raghavan and Michael Shear, "U.S. Aided in Attack in Yemen Thought to Have Killed Auluqi, 2 al-Qaeda Leaders," *Washington Post*, December 25, 2009. See also "Yemen: Cracking Under Pressure," Amnesty International, August 25, 2010, pp. 31-33.
22 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000016, p. 14.
23 Harmony Document, SOCOM-2012-0000017, p. 2.

24 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000016, p. 13.
25 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000019, p. 28.

26 Ibid., p. 20.
27 Ibid., pp. 29-30.
28 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000016.
29 Bin Ladin quoted from al-Wahayshi's previous letter, "If you want Sana'a, today is the day." See Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000016, p. 1.
30 This careful, deliberate orientation is replicated in Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000017, pp. 1, 3-4, 5. This is notable because this letter was intended for an unknown operative who appears to have been considering opportunities in an entirely new area, one where al-Qa`ida does not appear to have an operational history. That Bin Ladin would use similar analogies and explanations between a new area of operations and Yemen, where AQAP had been active since 2006, is fascinating.

fighters in Iraq and Afghanistan—both battlefields approved by Bin Ladin for open combat[31]—a refuge for operatives,[32] and a base for "international operations" as it had been in the 1990s.[33] Bin Ladin left no doubt as to where he wanted these "international operations" to take place: "Concentrate on the Yemeni emigrants who come back to visit Yemen and have American visas or citizenship to conduct operations inside America as long as they have not given their oath not to harm America. We need to extend and develop our operations and plans in America and not limit ourselves to blowing up airplanes."[34] Rather than scheming about how to take Sana`a, these are the outcomes Bin Ladin wanted al-Wahayshi to achieve.

This echoes guidance found elsewhere in the declassified documents. By late 2010, Bin Ladin was considering a more centralized campaign of violence focused exclusively on the United States.[35] Bin Ladin wrote,

> Whatever exceeds our energies, or we are unable to utilize in attacks inside America, as well as on the open fronts of jihad, should first be used to target American interests in non-Islamic countries like South Korea. And we shall avoid carrying out attacks in Islamic countries except for the countries that fell under invasion and direct occupation [Iraq, Afghanistan].[36]

Conclusion

By late 2010, Usama bin Ladin could have been forgiven for wondering if his letters were arriving in Yemen. AQAP's continued attacks against the security forces stood in direct contradiction to Bin Ladin's guidance, and it appears that Bin Ladin still judged "conditions" in Yemen as unsuitable for expanded military operations.[37] The documents suggest that these discrepancies were overshadowed by Bin Ladin's and `Atiyya's concerns about al-Wahayshi's operational plans. While these concerns were of an entirely different nature than the blatant tactical errors of AQI or the weak religious and legal knowledge of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan,[38] even before the Arab Spring Bin Ladin seemed specifically worried that AQAP's ambitions might lead them to consider overly expansive operations.

Events in Yemen substantiated some of these doubts, especially after the Arab Spring. As in Iraq, when letters sent to Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi by both Ayman al-Zawahiri and `Atiyya were ignored or refuted outright,[39] strategic guidance, even from the "shaykh" himself, was either disregarded by AQAP or perhaps simply did not arrive in time. From 2009 until the present, AQAP has actually increased its operations against the security forces. Although the relationship between the two groups is still not perfectly clear, since May 2011 Ansar al-Shari`a, a group with strong operational linkages to AQAP, has been engaged in establishing their own "emirates," mostly in Abyan governorate. This would seem to contradict Bin Ladin's guidance to al-Wahayshi about holding territory in Yemen.[40]

These outcomes have pushed Yemen away from the role that Bin Ladin envisioned as outlined in the documents: either as a "safe haven" for jihadists or a "reserve" force for al-Qa`ida in Afghanistan or Iraq. While the chaos that engulfed Yemen after the Arab Spring has emboldened and empowered sub-state actors of all ideological orientations, including

> "Bin Ladin viewed governance and ruling, especially before AQAP had the resources to do so, as the fastest way to undermine al-Qa`ida's reputation."

AQAP and Ansar al-Shari`a,[41] it has also been exploited by U.S. counterterrorism forces[42] through increased operations against AQAP and the resumption of direct support of the Yemeni military.[43] Instead of the reserve force for Iraq and Afghanistan that Bin Ladin desired, AQAP's actions in 2011-2012 transformed Yemen into an open front.

Of course, al-Wahayshi and Qasim al-Raymi, al-Wahayshi's deputy and AQAP's lead military commander, could have had a compelling rationale to ignore Bin Ladin's advice. Or Bin Ladin's guidance may simply have been overtaken by events, especially after the surge in protests in late March that brought security forces back to Sana`a to protect the Salih regime. With the implosion of the political status quo, al-Wahayshi and al-Raymi

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31 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000019, p. 20; Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000017, p. 5.

32 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000016, p. 3.

33 Ibid. Bin Ladin was vague about what time period he was referencing here. While this could be a reference to current developments, it seems more likely that this was a reference to the 1990s when a variety of jihadist groups including Islamic Jihad in Yemen and the Islamic Army of Aden Abyan were conducting operations in Yemen while the planning for the USS *Cole* operation and the East Africa embassy plots were simultaneously taking place. For more details on these groups, see *A False Foundation?* pp. 18-26.

34 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000016, p. 4.

35 Although intended for a different (and unknown) recipient, the guidance here mirrors much of the strategic direction provided in Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000017, pp. 1, 7. Also see Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000019, p. 7.

36 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000019, p. 5.

37 By April 26, 2011, even though Bin Ladin recognized that the Arab Spring had brought "unprecedented opportunities," he still asked `Atiyya to advise the "brothers in the regions" to be "patient" and avoid any "clashes" with Islamic parties, and to focus their efforts on "*da`wa*" (outreach). See Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000010, p. 4.

38 Lahoud et al., p. 22.

39 These letters can be found at the Combating Terrorism Center's website. For a discussion of their importance, see Brian Fishman, "After Zarqawi: The Dilemmas and Future of al-Qa`ida in Iraq," *Washington Quarterly* 29:4 (2006): pp. 19-32.

40 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000016, pp. 1-2.

41 This was acknowledged in an interview by `Adil al-Abab. When asked about tandhim al-Qa`ida's position on the revolution, he stated, "After things went out of the control of the central authorities in Sana`a, many places fell [into] the hands of a variety of different groups from Sa'ada to Abyan..." See "Abu Waqar hala taraktum li shaykh Aba Basir al-Tartusi," Shumukh al-Islam, accessed March 15, 2012.

42 Greg Miller, "Strike on Aulaqi Demonstrates Collaboration Between CIA and Military," *Washington Post*, September 30, 2011.

43 Greg Miller, "CIA Seeks New Authority to Expand Yemen Drone Campaign," *Washington Post*, April 17, 2012.

could have seen a unique opportunity to transform their movement into a broad-based popular insurgency. Given Bin Ladin's acknowledgement of Yemen's "suitability" for jihad, could not this sudden shift of fortune have demanded that AQAP's leaders disregard the "shaykh's" advice? By seizing territory, administering Shari`a and providing services, was not AQAP taking the first steps toward realizing al-Qa`ida's long-term goal of establishing an Islamic state?[44] Furthermore, these efforts do not appear to have negatively impacted the group's willingness or intent to strike the United States. In May 2012, evidence emerged of a failed plot by AQAP to attack a U.S.-bound flight by smuggling explosives onto a plane in an "improved" version of the explosive device worn by Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab in December 2009.[45] AQAP clearly remains focused on attacking the "head of the snake."

Time will tell whether this strategic shift was the right choice for AQAP, but the small selection of documents from the Abbottabad raid suggests two important points. First, while Bin Ladin viewed conditions in Yemen as favorable, he preferred a gradualist path toward establishing an Islamic state that focused its efforts on building consensus, conducting military operations against the United States, and exposing the hypocrisy of the Arab regimes. Second, Bin Ladin viewed governance and ruling, especially before AQAP had the resources to do so, as the fastest way to undermine al-Qa`ida's reputation. Both of these critiques have significant implications for AQAP's prospects for success in Yemen.

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44 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000016, p. 2.
45 Eric Schmitt and Scott Shane, "Rare Double Agent Disrupted Bomb Plot, U.S. Says," *New York Times*, May 8, 2012.

The Abbottabad Documents: The Quiet Ascent of Adam Gadahn

By Brian Dodwell

BEYOND THE OBVIOUS starring role played by Usama bin Ladin and the revelation of the consigliere-type position held by Abu `Abd al-Rahman (known as `Atiyya), the breakout personality from the recently declassified documents from Bin Ladin's Abbottabad compound might well be Adam Gadahn,[1] the California native who for the past 15 years has been progressing up the ranks of al-Qa`ida. Gadahn is mentioned several times in the documents, but it is the 21-page letter he wrote to an unspecified recipient in January 2011 that testifies to the significant role Gadahn played in Bin Ladin's al-Qa`ida.[2]

Gadahn's letter received considerable publicity both before and after the release of the Abbottabad documents.[3] Much of this attention, however, focused on the more salacious material Gadahn provided regarding his opinions of various Western media outlets and personalities. Not only does this information provide limited real value, but it is also not exactly revelatory that Gadahn played the role of media adviser—particularly with regard to Western media—within al-Qa`ida. Much more interesting is what he exposed about his own beliefs, his understanding of jihadist ideology, and his role beyond that of media adviser within the organization. This article provides an assessment of Gadahn's position and impact in al-Qa`ida, and includes a discussion of his trajectory as a propagandist and his emergence as a substantive contributor to debates with senior leadership over key ideological and strategic issues.

Gadahn and His Fellow Americans
Gadahn's evolving role in al-Qa`ida has been described as translator, video producer, cultural interpreter, and, most prominently, spokesperson.[4]

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1 Gadahn also uses the *kunya* Azzam al-Amriki.
2 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000004.
3 See, for example, David Ignatius, "How al-Qaeda Tried to Control the Media," *Washington Post*, March 20, 2012.
4 Raffi Khatchadourian, "Azzam the American," *New Yorker*, January 22, 2007.

After toiling away for several years off-camera, Gadahn made his onscreen debut (albeit masked) in October 2004, and he soon became a regular in al-Sahab videos. It was in these early videos that Gadahn earned his reputation as a somewhat awkward jihadist propagandist. His aggressively militant language and mannerisms belied his decidedly uninspiring physique, appearance and voice, leading one to question his actual operational credibility. He adapted this persona over time to a more scholarly one, but he was still not perceived as sufficiently inspirational.

The criticism of Gadahn's oratory skills was only enhanced by the fact that he suffered in comparison with more visually or audibly appealing American jihadist propagandists who came on the scene in the years following Gadahn's emergence—individuals such as Omar Hammami[5] and Anwar al-`Awlaqi.[6] From a strictly superficial perspective, the direct counterpoint to Gadahn was Hammami, the al-Shabab fighter whose vaguely Che Guevara-esque look and field commander persona was in stark contrast to Gadahn's nasally lecturing.[7] Yet Hammami is a classic example of style over substance, a fact reinforced by his universally-ridiculed hip-hop songs and his humiliating downfall earlier this year.[8] His March 2012 self-released video expressing his fears for his life at the hands of al-Shabab discredited his brash and confident image.[9]

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5 Hammami also uses the *kunya* Abu Mansoor al-Amriki.
6 Despite vast differences between the backgrounds, trajectories, and capabilities of these three men, casual observers often mention them in the same breath simply due to their shared status as Americans serving as jihadist propagandists.
7 Somewhat of a "one-hit wonder," Hammami's appearance in the Ambush at Bardale video in March 2009 launched him into stardom in the North American jihadist and counterterrorism communities, although he had made his first appearance two years earlier.
8 Christopher Anzalone, "The End of a Romance? The Rise and Fall of an American Jihadi: Omar Hammami's Relationship with Somalia's al-Shabab," al-Wasat Blog, March 17, 2012.
9 Video available at www.jihadology.net/2012/03/16/new-video-message-from-omar-hammami-abu-man%e1%b9%a3ur-al-amriki-urgent-message.

A more interesting comparison to Gadahn is al-`Awlaqi, who is a fascinating study of the balance between style and substance. It was al-`Awlaqi's substantive background as an imam in the United States that gave him his initial credibility, and he first acquired a growing following in the Western jihadist community through his words, not his actions. In fact, his "Constants on the Path of Jihad," which has been called "the single most influential work of jihadist incitement in the English language,"[10] is an audio recording, not a video. Yet style is not limited to appearance, and al-`Awlaqi demonstrated unique oratory skills that proved remarkably compelling to Western audiences, regardless of whether or not he was on camera.

As his stature grew, however, al-`Awlaqi tried to adopt a more operational image than the scholarly one he had portrayed to date (to align with the more operational role he is believed to have assumed), complete with somewhat awkward and unconvincing pictures of him with Kalashnikovs and even a shoulder-fired rocket. Al-`Awlaqi's efforts to expand beyond the persona with which he was already immensely successful, that of orator and inciter, likely had a role in the timing of his death.

Whereas Hammami's substance has consistently been questioned,[11] and al-`Awlaqi allowed his style-substance balance to shift, Gadahn appears to have evolved into a role best suited to his capabilities. It is difficult to imagine Gadahn shaming himself in the manner that Hammami did, and his more measured approach and ability to garner the respect of al-Qa`ida's leadership have likely helped him maintain more longevity than al-`Awlaqi.

What exactly is Gadahn's role? Gadahn's early attempts to portray an image to which he may not have been suited caused some observers to dismiss him as a puppet, nothing more than a useful English-speaking tool for al-Qa`ida's leaders. More keen observers have long acknowledged his technical media production skills and his significant role in managing al-Sahab and serving as the lead Western media adviser for al-Qa`ida, but in recent years he has rarely been seen as a particularly compelling figure worthy of deeper analysis than has already been conducted. The Adam Gadahn that emerges in the Abbottabad documents, however, is one with additional substantive layers worthy of discussion.

Gadahn the Ideologue

While Gadahn's appeal to Western audiences declined as he became more immersed in al-Qa`ida culture[12] and eclipsed by more extravagant Americans, it appears that he transcended his role as a propagandist to the West. While he is still relied on for his insights into American politics, culture and media, his 21-page letter demonstrated that he is at ease providing commentary and advice on a host of topics far beyond Western media strategy. What influence his advice had on the organization is difficult to discern based on these 17 documents, but the fact that he felt empowered to raise the substantive issues addressed in his letter demonstrates an evolution beyond just media tasks.

Gadahn appears to have carefully crafted a role for himself in the organization, and through competent performance has presumably garnered the respect necessary to expand that role.[13] The documents confirm an understanding of Gadahn as media adviser to al-Qa`ida's senior leadership, with Bin Ladin requesting his services by name twice, first to request that he translate[14] a book by British journalist

Robert Fisk, and then to provide input about which U.S. television channels to engage with for the 10th anniversary of 9/11.[15] In his letter, Gadahn completed his assignment, and then provided more wide-ranging thoughts on media strategy for the anniversary.

Gadahn then went a step further and provided an additional 15 pages of commentary and advice on various ideological and strategic issues. He wrote in an assertive and confident manner while maintaining a deferential style, showing an awareness of his rank that has likely served him well over the years.[16] In this commentary, Gadahn provided a scathing critique of what he saw as the unjust and counterproductive activities of certain regional jihadist groups. This critique appeared to align with Bin Ladin's own concerns that he expressed repeatedly in the Abbottabad letters.[17]

Gadahn provided a sophisticated criticism of al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI) and its attack on a Catholic church in Baghdad, pointing out AQI's lack of understanding of both the strategic context of such an attack at that time and the basic differences between the Catholic and Coptic Orthodox Churches. Gadahn identified public denunciation and the breaking of ties between al-Qa`ida and AQI as the only possible solution.[18] This goes beyond what even Bin Ladin advocated in terms of relations with the "affiliates," which appears to have been maintaining communication but withholding formal franchising.[19]

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10 J.M. Berger, "The Enduring Appeal of al-`Awlaqi's 'Constants on the Path of Jihad,'" *CTC Sentinel* 4:10 (2011).

11 In May 2012, Hammami released a 127-page autobiography. It will be interesting to see if his own writing on his trajectory leads to a reassessment of conventional wisdom regarding Hammami. See http://jihadology.net/2012/05/16/new-book-from-omar-hammami-abu-man%e1%b9%a3ur-al-amriki-the-story-of-an-american-jihadi-part-1/.

12 For a discussion of the relationship between Western appeal and immersion in jihadist culture, see J.M. Berger, *Jihad Joe: Americans Who Go to War in the Name of Islam* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books Inc, 2011), p. 155.

13 Although one should not discount the role played by U.S. counterterrorism efforts and the resulting al-Qa`ida leadership attrition in Gadahn's expanding role.

14 Of interest regarding Gadahn's capabilities is that his Arabic has been described as outstanding, demonstrat-

ing an impressive vocabulary. Full credit for this observation is reserved for Dr. Nelly Lahoud.

15 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000015, pp. 7-8.

16 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000004, p. 5. Gadahn criticized Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi, but repeatedly pointed out that he has kept his comments internal to the group so as not to create dispute, and then apologized for his "sharp" tone, something he writes he has been trying to fix.

17 Nelly Lahoud et al., *Letters from Abbottabad: Bin Ladin Sidelined?* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2012), p. 1.

18 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000004, pp. 5-8. For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see Lahoud, et al., pp. 27-28.

19 Lahoud et al., p. 21.

Equally significant was Gadahn's discussion of unlawful attacks that resulted in innocent Muslim deaths.[20] He cited as examples 13 such incidents, six of which targeted mosques, and five of which were explicitly attributed to Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), an organization that, he wrote, has a "black reputation."[21] Gadahn lamented "the ignorance that prevails amongst the ranks,"[22] and believed the jihadists' current predicament is due to "punishment by God on us… because of the sins of some of us and the silence of the rest of us."[23] Based on this assessment, he provided his "humble opinion" to the unidentified recipient of this letter that while "you have done well in what you have done" to handle this issue, secrecy and denial are not the answer.[24] He stated that, "As for exposing our weak spots in front of our enemies to exploit it, these attacks are—I swear—a greater shame and more horrible weak points."[25]

This may seem like an odd position to take for a man who, two years prior to writing this letter, released a video titled, "The Mujahideen Don't Target Muslims," in which he participated in the denials he later criticized. In this video, he stated that "Islam and its Shari`a (forbid) the taking of even one innocent life…(and that) the mujahidin declare themselves innocent of these attacks." He publicly blamed the attacks on the "more likely culprits," the CIA, Pakistani intelligence services, and the Blackwater security firm.[26] Two years later, in his private letter, he identified the real culprits and, somewhat admirably, took responsibility for al-

Qa`ida's silence: "The blame—or most of it—is laid on our shoulders. We contributed to that by not clarifying our stand on those forbidden acts in a sufficient way. We also contributed to the continuation of the perpetrators in their acts, by deferring the accusation from the contributors and blaming Blackwater Company instead."[27]

Given that in several of the incidents Gadahn cited in the letter the TTP publicly claimed responsibility for the attacks, his recommendation to come clean about responsibility is not simply naïve idealism; it is smart political "damage control" given that the denial strategy simply is not plausible. "Now that the matter is exposed to all, near and far, our silence will be despised by people…as we look in front of all as 'mute Satans' (or) in the best of cases as inattentive and not aware of what is happening around us," he wrote.[28] Gadahn closed his letter by drafting a statement that he suggested be released to address this issue directly. In it, he offered an unequivocal denunciation of these acts, and stated that if anyone proven responsible is connected with al-Qa`ida, the organization will "take the appropriate measures towards them."[29]

While Gadahn's assessment is not without its flaws, he was certainly keyed in on the precise issues that seemed to animate Bin Ladin the most in the Abbottabad letters. What impact did his input have? Gadahn's proposed declaration was never released, although Bin Ladin died only three months after this letter was written so it is impossible to know how he reacted. Bin Ladin's own thoughts on this topic, however, are instructive. His concern about the killing of Muslims is well documented,[30] but he also appeared to concur with Gadahn's suggestion to both publicly denounce such acts and publicly take responsibility when mistakes are made. He asked `Atiyya to send guidance to "every *amir* in the regions" to exercise control over their military actions and not conduct operations that unnecessarily risk Muslim lives. If such an event does occur, he asked

"for the brothers in all the regions to apologize and be held responsible for what happened," and if they do not, "we [al-Qa`ida] should then assume the responsibility and apologize for what happened."[31] Based on this document, one would presume that Gadahn's proposal reached a sympathetic ear.

Jihadist Forums and Biting the Hand that Feeds
Surprisingly, Gadahn's letter included a scathing criticism of the jihadist internet forums: "As for the jihadi forums, it is repulsive to most of the Muslims, or closed to them. It also distorts the face of al-Qa`ida, due to what you know of the bigotry, the sharp tone that characterizes most of the participants in these forums."

Gadahn's criticism of the forums is fascinating given his prominent role in populating these entities with material (due to his position in al-Sahab). The forums are the primary conduit through which his words reach the ears of his audiences. As to what motivates his disdain, as can be seen from his candid ideological critiques discussed above, inappropriate and counterproductive application of jihadist ideology is a genuine concern for Gadahn, and nowhere is lack of control over the message more an issue than on the internet. Yet is Gadahn's view reflective of al-Qa`ida leadership more broadly?

Interestingly, Bin Ladin appeared to have some positive comments regarding the forums. He wrote of "the wide-scale spread of jihadist ideology, especially on the internet, and the tremendous number of young people who frequent the jihadist websites—a major achievement for jihad…."[32] While this statement may appear to contradict Gadahn's, a closer look reveals that Bin Ladin's praise was limited to the medium of the internet and the potential it has to facilitate engagement with a wide audience. He did not directly comment on the content of the forums, but through various directives he gave to `Atiyya, it appears that he, like Gadahn, was not pleased with the current state of jihadist forum content. He asked

20 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000004, p. 11. He titled this section of his report, "It has Become Unbearable and the Avalanche has Arrived: The Tragedy of Tolerating the Spilling of Blood, Resources and Honor, and our Duty towards this Dangerous Phenomenon."

21 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000004, p. 13.

22 Ibid., p. 14.

23 Ibid., p. 15.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., p. 16. He elaborated that these acts "distort the picture of the pious and loyal mujahidin" and that "regular people" look at the mujahidin and see a group that shies away from music or looking at a foreign woman (issues that "mean very little to the common public"), but has no problem "spilling the blood of scores of people in order to kill one or two who were labeled as enemies."

26 Adam Gadahn, "The Mujahideen Don't Target Muslims," December 2009.

27 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000004, p. 16.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., p. 18.

30 For details on Bin Ladin's writings regarding the killing of innocent Muslims, see Lahoud et al.

31 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000019, pp. 9-10.

32 Ibid., p. 3.

`Atiyya and "Shaykh Abu Yahya"[33] to "write some articles and provide advice to those working in the jihad media in general to include the author partisans to the mujahidin on the internet."[34] One of the topics he wanted addressed is the pitfall of *takfir*, presumably to tackle his running concern about the killing of Muslims. He also proposed running all the brothers who arrive in Pakistan through "a quick training course that is heavy on ideology," to ensure they are "distinguished and capable" as recruiters, and then "send (them) to (their) country to conduct specific missions like inciting for jihad over the internet."[35] He appeared to support jihadist use of the internet to spread the ideology, but wanted concrete steps taken to ensure that those conducting this activity are qualified to do so responsibly.

Gadahn's Impact

It is not revelatory that Gadahn discussed such topics in this letter. In recent years, he has consistently tackled issues of substance in his public speeches. Yet the level of candor and assertiveness with senior leadership so evident in a letter that was never intended for public eyes is noteworthy. Despite their limitations, this is the value of captured documents when compared with public speeches.[36] The Abbottabad letter suggests that Gadahn grew in confidence over the years, thinking and speaking for himself, including expressing ideological criticisms of the decisions of his superiors. One may

debate the precision of his critiques (although it appears they were in line with many of Bin Ladin's concerns), but the point here is that Gadahn's willingness to provide them and his superiors' willingness to allow him to contribute to such internal debates suggests a more substantive role for Gadahn in al-Qa`ida than has been previously acknowledged.

Other questions still remain. If Gadahn's effectiveness as a propagandist to the West has been in decline,[37] but he is increasingly influential as an al-Qa`ida ideological adviser, what is his broader impact in this role? With the deaths of Bin Ladin and `Atiyya, has Gadahn lost his key patrons and supporters within al-Qa`ida or has Ayman al-Zawahiri also empowered the Californian?[38] Watching how Gadahn's star rises or falls within today's al-Qa`ida will provide interesting hints as to the shape and direction of the organization under its new leadership.

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The Threat from Swarm Attacks: Case Studies from the North Caucasus

By Cerwyn Moore

SWARM ATTACKS ARE high-risk, coordinated assaults sometimes directed against multiple targets or building complexes, using mobile groups to circumvent security measures, allowing attackers to inflict casualties, garner news coverage and, in recent years, to inflict considerable damage prior to the neutralization of the assailants.[1] In some cases particular methods have been melded, with one set of gunmen undertaking shooting sprees and hostage-taking, while another group of gunmen become involved in simultaneous barricade siege incidents.[2] Even though the label "swarm attack" has appeared relatively recently, and although, in a military context, the features and novelty associated with this tactic remain contested, the term has been adopted and applied more widely to describe these types of attacks.[3]

These hybrid operations—such as the attacks in Mumbai in November 2008—highlight the devastating impact that trained, mobile units can cause.[4] The Mumbai attacks lasted for around three days, generating a considerable amount of news coverage. The militants had lines of communication to external groups, further compounding the barricade siege situation that followed the initial assault.[5] Similar tactics were used in October 2009, when militants launched an audacious attack against the General Headquarters of the Pakistani Army in Rawalpindi; in June 2011, when suicide attackers targeted the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul; and in late 2011, when Pakistani militants targeted a high-security military base

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33 Presumably Abu Yahya al-Libi.

34 Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000019, p. 14.

35 Ibid., p. 43. Bin Ladin also included a letter he received from "Shaykh Yunis," presumably Yunis al-Mauritani, who stated that "we are experiencing the most favorable atmosphere in the history of the Islamic nation...[with] a base of youths adopting our teachings...without any efforts on our parts to teach them the faith. They are ready for anything posted for them on the 'spider web' (i.e., internet)." But Yunis then cautioned that while this can be a very good thing, they have to guard against the "pitfall" of "inflexibility and narrow-mindedness; and must have concise, written instructions published for all the awakening youths to know our stand." He then specifically cited narrow-minded material currently being spread on the internet as the reason for his concern. See Harmony Document SOCOM-2012-0000019, pp. 46-47.

36 In that they provide a totally different perspective on both individuals and the organization than found in public statements. For more on both the limitations and the value of captured documents, see Lahoud et al., pp. 6-9.

37 This is not to suggest that Gadahn is incapable of still having an impact in this sphere. He clearly still understands what appeals to his audience. In his more recent public statements, he has embraced the same call for individual jihad in the West that has made al-`Awlaqi and *Inspire* magazine so notorious. This despite the fact that this strategy would appear to only exacerbate the concerns both Gadahn and Bin Ladin have regarding ideological deviations and lack of control over the global jihad by the more "responsible" jihadists in "al-Qa`ida central." These potential conflicts and contradictions are worthy of further analysis, analysis that is beyond the scope and space limitations of this article.

38 History suggests a positive relationship between Gadahn and al-Zawahiri, who provided a personal introduction and endorsement for Gadahn in the September 2006 video titled "An Invitation to Islam." The released Abbottabad documents, however, do not support a more current assessment of this relationship due to the lack of al-Zawahiri material in them and the unknown reason for this gap.

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1 For a review of the historical evolution of *fidayin* operations, see Adam Dolnik, "Fighting to the Death," *The RUSI Journal* 155:2 (2010): pp. 60-68.

2 Tom Monahan and Mark Stainbrook, "Learning the Lessons of the 2008 Mumbai Terrorist Attacks," *The Police Chief* 78 (2011): pp. 24-32.

3 See, for example, John Arquilla, "The Coming Swarm," *New York Times*, February 14, 2009.

4 John P. Sullivan and Adam Elkus, "Preventing Another Mumbai: Building a Police Operational Art," *CTC Sentinel* 2:6 (2009).

5 Dolnik, "Fighting to the Death."

in central Karachi in a coordinated attack, leading to an extended barricade siege that lasted more than 18 hours. This wave of swarm attacks has been conducted by small groups of attackers, often numbering less than 10 individuals, in operations culminating in barricade-siege incidents.

In recent years, however, other swarm attacks—namely large-scale, multipronged attacks within insurgencies, in which attackers have withdrawn or managed to negotiate safe passage from a barricade siege incident—have also been executed. These attacks pose considerable problems for law enforcement agencies seeking to develop countermeasures, both within evolving counterinsurgency doctrines and also within counterterrorism policymaking circles. The scale of such attacks and the range of targets, which are often attacked simultaneously, means responders may have to remain mobile themselves, while those negotiating or responding from law enforcement agencies will also have to be highly trained and well coordinated to manage short-term fluid incident dynamics. The more permanent effects of such attacks are unforeseen political implications that come with acts of terrorism.

To understand the features of swarm attacks, a useful region of study is the North Caucasus. The North Caucasus is of particular interest due to the sheer number and scale of swarm attacks (Budyonnovsk, 1995; Kizlyar, 1996; Nazran, 2004; Nalchik, 2005); the melding of tactics by militants (Nord Ost, 2002; Beslan, 2004); and because countermeasures adopted by the federal authorities have been largely unsuccessful, illustrating the need, where possible, to adopt a managed and measured response to particular attacks.

Drawing on examples from the North Caucasus, this article will assess some of the tactical features of swarm attacks, leading to some policy-related themes and challenges that counterterrorism specialists may wish to consider.

The Budyonnovsk Hospital Raid

Over the years, insurgents linked to the North Caucasus have demonstrated a capacity to adapt and vary their use of tactics, including employing lightening raids, mass hostage-taking with suicidal intent, and barricade sieges.[6] Some attacks directed against building complexes have been barricade siege incidents, such as the October 2002 Nord Ost theater siege, or the September 2004 Beslan school siege.[7] In other swarm attacks, speed and mobility have been emphasized, such as in the June 2004 raid on Nazran, or the sortie in Nalchik in Kabardino-

> **"The military itself made a number of mistakes. Using heavy weapons, failing to secure a cordon around the hospital complex, and not having an adequate negotiation strategy all impacted the incident dynamics."**

Balkaria in October 2005, in which lightening raids directed against multiple targets left scores dead and injured. Other attacks, including independent military operations, have also included an element of mass hostage taking and suicidal intent, such as the 1995 Budyonnovsk hospital raid. This latter attack is a perfect case study for specialists working on swarm attacks.

The raid itself began when dozens of lightly armed volunteers—led by Chechen militant Shamil Basaev—disembarked from a small group of trucks and split into three groups, simultaneously attacking three targets (the police headquarters, the town hall, and the local market). After the initial assault, the gunmen gathered hostages and established barricades around the town hall. The town hall

was not suitable for a barricade siege, however, and by this point Basaev had a handful of injured men requiring medical attention. In the ensuing hours, and demonstrating a measure of improvisation, Basaev and his men used hostages as human shields, retreating to the local hospital, rejoining a small scouting party that had arrived some hours earlier, where they barricaded themselves into the building complex.

The speed of the raid caught federal officials off-guard. The mobility of the attackers, coupled with the detailed planning, clear lines of command-and-control, and the capacity to improvise enabled them to mine parts of the building and establish firing points in the hospital complex. The ensuing three day stand-off, in which the hostage-takers fought off repeated counterattacks by Russian assault teams, demonstrated that a large-scale, multipronged assault involving more than 100 assailants could provide a significant psychological blow within a broader war effort.[8] Eventually, the federal authorities negotiated an end to the incident, allowing the hostage-takers safe passage back to Chechnya.[9]

In the Budyonnovsk hospital raid, the capacity to learn and the ability to improvise during the swarm attack was evident. First, the capacity to use mobility to great effect in the opening phase of the assault was clearly significant. Second, the ability to improvise and show leadership during the assault was also essential; although more than 110 volunteers participated in the attack, a small cadre led by Basaev were experienced and loyal veteran Chechen fighters, some of whom had trained and fought alongside him in the Abkhaz civil war. Finally, both the target, deep in Russian territory, and the scale of the attack had a marked effect, signaling to the federal authorities a continued capacity to launch sophisticated and extremely deadly raids. These features were honed further following the outbreak of the regional anti-Russian conflict in April

6 Cerwyn Moore and Paul Tumelty, "Foreign Fighters and the Case of Chechnya: A Critical Assessment," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31:5 (2008): pp. 412-433.

7 Adam Dolnik and Keith Fitzgerald, *Negotiating Hostage Crisis with the New Terrorists* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008).

8 See, for example, A. Maskhadov, "Interview: Aslan Maskhadov," 1999, available at www.smallwarsjournal.com/documents/maskhadovinterview.pdf.

9 Cerwyn Moore, "Negotiating Hostage Crises in Russia: Mass Hostage-taking from Budyonnovsk to Beslan," Research Paper, forthcoming 2012.

1999. Evidently the experience—and the apparent success of the Budyonnovsk hospital raid—informed the use of mass hostage taking with suicidal intent in both the Nord Ost raid in Moscow in 2002 and the Beslan school siege in 2004.[10]

The Budyonnovsk raid is also of considerable importance for analysts and policymakers precisely because the attackers improvised during the incident, using mobility and subsequently commandeering a hospital building complex. From this complex, the militants used hostages to great effect, and manipulated the extended media coverage to shape the incident dynamics—while the timing of the raid, when Boris Yeltsin was traveling overseas, caused problems for the political and military leaders managing the incident. The military itself made a number of mistakes. Using heavy weapons, failing to secure a cordon around the hospital complex, and not having an adequate negotiation strategy all impacted the incident dynamics. Learning from the Budyonnovsk raid, law enforcement globally must develop variable strategies to manage incidents, drawing on a range of international examples.

The June 2004 Raid on Nazran

By 2004, Russian authorities had developed some security measures to protect against swarm attacks, including a clear chain of command and control, designed for federal forces to deal with hostage taking incidents and attacks directed against individual targets; the hardening of security around federal installations; and a longer term strategy, using sweep operations and checkpoints to isolate and eliminate small groups of attackers.

Yet in the Ingush city of Nazran on June 21, 2004, rebels altered their swarm tactics to circumvent Russian security measures. A multiethnic group of attackers launched a large-scale raid directed against multiple targets in Nazran, along with two other smaller attacks in local villages.[11] More than 100 attackers were involved in the raids directed against eight key federal

targets in the city.[12] These included the Interior Ministry (MVD) building, police and security service barracks, as well as border guards stationed in the city. The attackers, disguised as local militia, established roadblocks and proceeded to kill around a dozen senior local political and military leaders, including the acting interior minister and his deputy. After five hours, having seized munitions from

> "The temporary roadblocks enabled the attackers to systematically check registration documentation—effectively allowing them to pull security personnel who were responding to the attacks from their vehicles."

the MVD arms depot and taking around 20 local police officers as hostages, the attackers withdrew.[13] The mobility of the attackers, and their capacity to improvise during the raid, offered them a measure of operational autonomy. On occasion, it appears groups changed targets, having failed, for instance, to release political prisoners from the local jail. Similarly, the multipronged nature of the attack caused confusion for the local authorities.

The raid left around 100 law enforcement personnel, including half a dozen civilians, dead. In contrast, reports indicate that the attackers managed to withdraw with minimal losses. Indeed, the capacity to withdraw from such a large-scale raid highlights that this operation had also been meticulously planned. Reports from federal sources indicated that Shamil Basaev, along with a group of trusted aides, organized the raid.[14] Around six weeks later, rebel news outlets published a statement

indicating that the multipronged raid was part of a series of regional attacks, indicating that the raid had a strategic character. At the same time, these reports also noted that the attack was timed to coincide with the national day of Memory and Sorrow in Russia, commemorating the invasion by Nazi Germany.[15] Even though the raid on Nazran was a swarm attack, it was also a symbolic sortie timed to impact the Russian military psyche, signaling to the federal authorities the continued capacity of the Basaev-led regional insurgency.

The raid on Nazran illustrates how groups themselves adapt their own strategies, impacting on incident dynamics, underscoring the role of communication technologies in, and the timing of, attacks, while also highlighting specific methods—such as simultaneous attacks on a range of targets and use of mobile groups—to amplify the impact of evolving tactics.

Evolving Tactics

A number of points differentiating the Nazran attack from the Budyonnovsk raid are worth underscoring, particularly insofar as they illustrate how swarm attacks were used, how they evolved and how Chechen-led groups sought to overcome countermeasures. First, unlike Budyonnovsk, which was almost exclusively launched by Chechen fighters, the raid in Nazran was conducted and led by local Ingush units, supported by a smaller number of Chechen units. The local knowledge of the Ingush raiders, coupled with the military experience and finance provided by the Basaev network, was difficult to counter; not only had the tactics evolved, but the broader issues, such as the motives for the attack, had also changed.[16] Reportedly, the operation was also part funded and planned by experienced foreign volunteers, linked to Shamil Basaev.[17] In particular then, a younger generation of capable Ingush volunteers, such as Ali Taziev (Emir Magas), used surprise and impudence to outwit security agencies

10 Adam Dolnik, *Negotiating the Impossible: The Beslan Hostage-Crisis* (London: RUSI, 2007).
11 ITAR-TASS, June 22, 2004.

12 RIA Novosti, June 22, 2004.
13 Kavkaz Tsentr, June 22, 2004.
14 "Echo Ingushskih Sobityi," *Groznenskii Rabochii*, July 29, 2004.

15 Imran Rigkhoyev, "Ingush Battle Cry," *Daymokh*, July 2004.
16 "Chechen Interior Minister Names Suspects," ITAR-TASS, June 22, 2004.
17 ITAR-TASS, July 20, 2004

in the North Caucasus in support of a regional insurgency.

Second, whereas Budyonnovsk was more than 43 miles from the conflict in Chechnya, the raiders in Ingushetia used their local knowledge to considerable effect. The raiders established their own temporary roadblocks, vetting traffic and cutting off all the roads to the city center. This disrupted official communications, hampering the movement of the local police, and compromising the management of the federal response.[18] The temporary roadblocks enabled the attackers to systematically check registration documentation—effectively allowing them to pull security personnel who were responding to the attacks from their vehicles. Meanwhile, other mobile groups sought to identify and kill other high-profile security and political personnel, neutering the capacity of the authorities to respond to such a large-scale incident.[19]

Third, Budyonnovsk was a direct result of federal actions in Chechnya, framed by the narrative of a secessionist conflict. In the raid in Nazran, it appears that small groups targeted the military and political hierarchy, reportedly responding to local instances of repression, killing and wounding scores of federal law enforcement officers.[20] Many of the groups also remained mobile, and the attacks were supported by diversionary raids in Ingushetia, as well as on the military highway in Ossetia, and further afield in Dagestan. The swarm attack on Nazran occurred over a period of around five hours, but then became part of a series of coordinated regional attacks as opposed to an independent, individual and isolated incident, like Budyonnovsk.

Fourth, while a degree of improvisation shaped the hospital raid—the attackers were perhaps aiming to target a military airbase near the town—the swarm attack in Nazran was explicitly directed against multiple targets, simultaneously. This increased the capacity of the attacks

to overwhelm tactical responses and security measures designed to react to raids directed against single targets. The attackers also used a variety of methods such as temporary roadblocks, diversionary attacks, raids on security infrastructure and targeted assassinations.[21] Although hostages were taken in Nazran, this was neither a direct aim nor an improvised aspect of the attack; evidently the units needed to remain mobile to maximize their impact.

Fifth, the attackers in Nazran did not barricade themselves into buildings, but instead raided targets in a coordinated short-term operation, thereby overwhelming the security infrastructure in Nazran.[22] Police and MVD barracks were attacked, while the arms depot at the MVD building was also raided, before each group systematically retreated. In this regard, the attackers not only planned to withdraw, but also had long-term plans to disband, distribute and hide the significant amount of munitions they seized.[23]

The raid on Nazran also had a number of purposes. It was symbolic, but was also part of a broader long-term military strategy designed to destabilize the region, unlike the attack in Budyonnovsk in which attackers barricaded themselves in a building complex and were prepared to fight to the death.

Conclusion

Swarm attacks are a continued threat for policymakers and counterterrorism specialists, a point brought into sharp relief by the recent coordinated attacks in Kabul. Importantly, however, there are different forms of "swarm attacks," in which a variety of methods are used. This leads to a number of key themes, as demonstrated in the two case studies.

First, some attacks start with shooting sprees, conducted by small highly mobile units, culminating in barricade siege incidents in fixed sites and buildings. Other forms of swarm attacks, involving large numbers of raiders, have occurred as well.

Although culminating in barricade sieges, swarm attacks involving mass hostage taking, particularly in which the attackers have suicidal intent, are rare. Thus, the degree of mobility plays an important role in different types of swarm attacks.

Second, swarm attacks can be directed against multiple targets in coordinated operations, compounding the ability of law enforcement agencies to respond. In rare cases, such as through the examples used, groups and networks demonstrate a capacity to learn, tactically and strategically, in theater.

Third, the capacity to launch swarm attacks requires a measure of military capability, leadership, and a willingness and capacity. Few incidents appear to have occurred that have included improvisation during the assault themselves.

Finally, it is important not to ascribe incidents such as swarm attacks as wholly new, but rather to recognize how groups have adapted and varied their usage of these tactics as varying constraints are placed upon them. Virtually all of the attacks employed in recent years, including many aspects of the 2008 Mumbai raid, or the swarm attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan, have in fact already occurred in the North Caucasus.

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18 RIA Novosti, June 22, 2004.

19 "Attackers were Ingushetians," Kavkaz Tsentr, June 22, 2004.

20 Liz Fuller, "Repercussions of Nazran Attack Still Reverberate," RFE/RL, June 19, 2009.

21 "Nightly Attack," Kavkaz Tsentr, June 22, 2004.

22 Viktor Baranets, "1500 Terrorists," *Komsoloskaya Pravda*, June 24, 2004.

23 Rigkhoyev.

Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity

April 1, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A bomb killed a police official in Uruzgan Province. The slain officer, Toor Jan, was in charge of several checkpoints in Uruzgan's capital Tarin Kot. – *AP, April 1*

April 2, 2012 (UNITED STATES): An image appeared on Islamist websites showing a picture of the Manhattan skyline with the words, "Al Qaeda Coming Soon Again in New York." The NYPD Intelligence Division's cyber unit said it was investigating the origin of the image. "There's nothing operational about this but obviously it's cause for concern and it reminds us that New York is very much on their minds," said New York Police Commissioner Ray Kelly. – *Newsday, April 2; ABC News, April 3*

April 2, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): Militants attacked a police post in Helmand Province, killing four police officers and two civilians. Three other police officers were missing. – *New York Times, April 3*

April 2, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): Militants attacked a police checkpoint in Badakhshan Province, killing three police officers. An additional 11 police officers were missing. – *New York Times, April 3*

April 2, 2012 (PAKISTAN): A judge in Pakistan sentenced Usama bin Ladin's three widows and two daughters to 45 days of house detention for living illegally in Pakistan. After they serve out the term of their house arrest, they will all be deported to Saudi Arabia. – *CNN, April 2; USA Today, April 13*

April 2, 2012 (PAKISTAN): Heavily-armed Taliban fighters attacked a security post in Mohmand Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Four security personnel and at least 14 militants were killed. – *RTTNews, April 2; Voice of America, April 2*

April 3, 2012 (UNITED STATES): The U.S. government offered a $10 million bounty for Hafiz Saeed, the founder of the Pakistan-based militant group Lashkar-i-Tayyiba (LeT). Saeed is now the chief of Jama`at-ud-Da`wa (JuD), widely considered an LeT front group. According to the BBC, Saeed "was in Islamabad last week protesting outside parliament—calling for Pakistan to cut all ties with both the US and India. He has consistently denied any suggestion that either he or JuD—which he says is a charity—have played any role in militant violence. The Pakistani government has not commented on the US announcement, but it has long argued that it cannot take action against him unless police or the courts formally instigate proceedings." – *BBC, April 3*

April 3, 2012 (YEMEN): Yemeni officials said that a series of U.S.-supported airstrikes led by the Yemeni Air Force killed dozens of fighters linked to al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula in the country's south. – *CNN, April 3*

April 3, 2012 (MALI): French Foreign Affairs Minister Alain Juppe warned that the Tuareg rebellion that has seized control of half of Mali is increasingly dominated by Islamists who are "closely tied" to al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb. "Apparently, there are two opposing tendencies among the Tuaregs," explained Juppe. "On one hand, the MNLA wants independence for Azawad, which is unacceptable to us because we're very committed to Mali's territorial integrity. Then, there's another faction, Ansar Dine, which is closely tied to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. Its goals are not clear, but it may be to install an Islamic regime across the whole of Mali." – *AFP, April 3*

April 4, 2012 (UNITED STATES): The U.S. military formally ordered a military trial for five alleged al-Qa`ida militants who are accused of planning the 9/11 attacks on the United States that killed nearly 3,000 people. The self-proclaimed mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, Khalid Shaykh Muhammad, is one of the defendants. The trial will be held at the U.S. military base at Guantanamo Bay, and the defendants could face the death penalty if found guilty. – *Voice of America, April 5*

April 4, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber on a motorcycle detonated explosives among a group of U.S. soldiers and Afghan police officers in Maimana, Faryab Province. The explosion killed at least nine people, including three U.S. soldiers. According to the *New York Times*, the attack has "raised concerns that the Taliban are moving into a spring offensive now that the high mountain passes are thawing and travel routes from Pakistan are opening." – *New York Times, April 4*

April 4, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): Militants attacked an outpost manned by a government-sponsored militia in Farah Province, killing 10 members of the security force. – *AP, April 5*

April 4, 2012 (SOMALIA): A female suicide bomber targeted a ceremony marking the one-year anniversary of Somali National Television, killing at least eight people. The president of Somalia's Olympic Committee and the head of the football association were among the dead. The attack, which was claimed by al-Shabab, occurred at Somalia's national theater. – *Bloomberg, April 4; Voice of America, April 4*

April 4, 2012 (NIGERIA): Suspected Boko Haram gunmen killed seven people in a market in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State. – *Reuters, April 5*

April 5, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber targeted a bazaar in Kishim district of northeastern Badakhshan Province, killing two people, including Nazok Mir, an elder in the region. According to the Associated Press, "Provincial governor Shah Waliullah Adeeb said the attacker was targeting Nazok Mir, an area elder who commanded Afghan fighters against the Soviets in the 1980s. Insurgents killed Mir's brother last year. Insurgents plot to kill leading figures in the north to eliminate opposition to the Taliban, which has its strongholds in the south." – *AP, April 5; BBC, April 5*

April 5, 2012 (PAKISTAN): A Pakistani Taliban suicide bomber detonated his explosives near a vehicle carrying a senior police official in Karachi, killing four people. The target of the bombing, Malir police chief Rao Anwar, was not injured. – *AP, April 5*

April 6, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghan and U.S.-led coalition forces apprehended a militant from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in Faryab Province. – *AP, April 7*

April 6, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber killed the head of a provincial peace council and his son in Kunar Province. The peace envoy was identified as Mohammad Hashim Munib. – *Voice of America, April 6*

April 6, 2012 (YEMEN): A suicide bomber from al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula died after his explosives detonated prematurely. The bomber was planning to attack an intelligence office in Mansoura in Aden Province. – *AP, April 6*

April 8, 2012 (NIGERIA): A suicide bomber in a vehicle detonated explosives near a church on Easter morning in Kaduna, killing at least 38 people. Analysts suspect that the Boko Haram group was responsible. – *Wall Street Journal, April 8; New York Times, April 8*

April 9, 2012 (SOMALIA): A bomb tore through a market in Baidoa, killing at least 11 people. – *AFP, April 9*

April 10, 2012 (UNITED KINGDOM): Europe's human rights court ruled that the United Kingdom can extradite Abu Hamza al-Masri, a radical Muslim cleric, and four other suspects to the United States to face terrorism charges. According to the Associated Press, "The court said Britain would not violate EU human rights rules by extraditing the suspects, who could face life sentences in a maximum-security prison." – *AP, April 10*

April 10, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber in a vehicle killed 12 people outside a government center in Guzara district of Herat Province. – *New York Times, April 10*

April 10, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): Three suicide bombers attacked the Musa Qala district headquarters in Helmand Province, killing at least four police officers. – *New York Times, April 10; AP, April 10*

April 10, 2012 (YEMEN): Militants belonging to Ansar al-Shari`a, which has ties to al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula, attacked a military post in Marib Province, killing at least eight soldiers. – *CNN, April 10*

April 12, 2012 (UNITED STATES): Tarek Mehanna, 29-years-old, was sentenced to 17 and one-half years in prison for conspiring to help al-Qa`ida. Mehanna, a U.S. citizen, grew up in a Boston suburb but later traveled to Yemen to seek training at a terrorist camp with the intention of going to Iraq to fight against U.S. soldiers. – *AP, April 12*

April 13, 2012 (UNITED STATES): Jubair Ahmad, who lived in Woodbridge, Virginia, was sentenced to 12 years in prison for providing material support to Lashkar-i-Tayyiba. He is 24-years-old. – *AFP, April 13*

April 14, 2012 (YEMEN): A U.S. drone reportedly killed seven members of al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula in the town of al-Zahar south of Sana`a. – *AP, April 14*

April 15, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): Multiple Taliban gunmen—who the Central Intelligence Agency later identified as members of the Haqqani network—launched an assault on Kabul, targeting the diplomatic quarter and the parliament. At the same time, other Taliban fighters launched coordinated assaults in three eastern provinces. According to the *New York Times*, "The multiple sieges ended in Kabul on Monday [April 16] morning after nearly 18 hours, and silence fell on the city with roads in the bullet-strafed areas beginning to reopen…The assaults—at least three in Kabul, two in Nangarhar Province and one each in Paktia and Logar Provinces—began simultaneously at 1:45 p.m., and witnesses described nearly identical patterns of attack: light gunfire, followed by explosions and then protracted firefights with Afghan security forces, with the militants in several cases fighting from empty buildings or construction sites near their main targets." At least five civilians were killed, in a surprisingly low casualty count. Authorities killed 39 of the assailants, 16 of them in Kabul. – *New York Times, April 15; New York Times, April 16; Voice of America, April 16*

April 15, 2012 (PAKISTAN): Hundreds of Taliban fighters raided a prison in Bannu District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, freeing 384 inmates. Among those freed were 21 high-profile prisoners. – *CNN, April 16*

April 17, 2012 (SAUDI ARABIA): Saudi Arabia said that al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) has taken credit for the kidnapping of a Saudi diplomat in Yemen last month. The diplomat, Abdullah al-Khaldi, is the deputy consul at the Saudi consulate in Aden. AQAP is demanding the release of prisoners and a ransom payment. – *AP, April 17*

April 17, 2012 (YEMEN): A suicide bomber in a vehicle killed three Yemeni soldiers in Abyan Province. – *AP, April 17*

April 18, 2012 (NIGERIA): The U.S. government warned its citizens living in Nigeria that Boko Haram is plotting attacks in the capital, Abuja, "including against hotels frequently visited by Westerners." – *Reuters, April 18*

April 18, 2012 (AZERBAIJAN): The Azeri government said that its security forces killed the head of an al-Qa`ida-linked group and arrested 19 of his followers. The alleged leader of the group was identified as Azeri citizen Vugar Padaro. – *Reuters, April 18*

April 19, 2012 (UNITED STATES): Saajid Badat, a UK terrorist convicted for plotting in December 2001 to blow up a shoe bomb on an airliner heading from Europe to the United States, revealed in a U.S. court that he met Usama bin Ladin several times in Afghanistan. Badat later said that Bin Ladin expected the shoe bombing plot to bring down the U.S. economy. According to Badat, "So he [Bin Ladin] said the American economy is like a chain. If you break one—one link of the chain, the whole economy will be brought down. So after Sept. 11 attacks, this operation [the shoe bombing plot] will ruin the aviation industry and in turn the whole economy will come down." – *CNN, April 20; NBC, April 24*

April 19, 2012 (IRAQ): Near simultaneous bomb blasts tore through Baghdad and at least five northern cities, killing approximately 30 people. The Islamic State of Iraq claimed responsibility. – *Deutsche Welle, April 19; AP, April 20*

April 20, 2012 (NORWAY): Anders Behring Breivik, who has admitted to conducting the July 22, 2011, terrorist attacks in Oslo, told a court that he

acquired the knowledge to carry out the bombing and shooting attack on the internet by studying case studies from al-Qa`ida. – *AP, April 20*

April 21, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghan officials announced that they arrested five militants with 11 tons of explosives that they had brought from Pakistan with the intent to carry out a major attack in Kabul. Three of the five men arrested with the explosives were reportedly members of the Pakistani Taliban, while the other two were from the Afghan Taliban. Afghan officials also said that they foiled an assassination plot against the vice president. – *AP, April 21*

April 22, 2012 (YEMEN): Mohammed Saeed Umda, a senior al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) operative, was killed by a U.S. drone in Marib Province. He has been described as the "fourth-most wanted" AQAP militant. – *Los Angeles Times, April 24; ABC, April 24*

April 23, 2012 (UNITED STATES): During the trial of Adis Medunjanin in a federal court in Brooklyn, Bryant Neal Vinas "provided details of a plan for a suicide bomber to detonate explosives aboard a Long Island Railroad train as it entered a tunnel on the commuter line to create maximum devastation," according to CNN. – *CNN, April 23*

April 24, 2012 (YEMEN): Yemeni officials said that they have recaptured the strategic southern town of Zinjibar from al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula. – *Los Angeles Times, April 24*

April 24, 2012 (PAKISTAN): A bomb tore through a Lahore railway station, killing at least two people. – *BBC, April 24*

April 26, 2012 (NIGERIA): A suicide bomber attacked the offices of the Nigerian newspaper *This Day* in Abuja, killing four people. Authorities suspect that Boko Haram was involved in the attack. – *AFP, April 26*

April 26, 2012 (NIGERIA): A car bomb exploded outside a complex housing a number of newspaper offices, including *This Day*, in Kaduna. Four people were killed. Authorities suspect that Boko Haram was involved in the attack. – *AFP, April 26*

April 26, 2012 (PAKISTAN): Pakistan confirmed that Usama bin Ladin's three widows, two adult daughters, as well as nine children—at least one of whom is a grandchild—have been deported to Saudi Arabia. – *Telegraph, April 26*

April 27, 2012 (SYRIA): A suicide bomber attacked the Damascus Zain al-Abideen mosque, killing nine people, including a number of security officers. According to Reuters, "A local resident said security officials at the scene told him a man in military uniform had triggered an explosives vest when he was challenged by soldiers as he walked towards the area." A group calling itself Jabhat al-Nusra claimed responsibility. – *Reuters, April 27; Lebanese Daily Star, April 29*

April 28, 2012 (AFGHANISTAN): According to the *New York Times*, "In an episode with worrisome significance for the security industry, two Taliban insurgents with pistols hidden in their shoes evaded a U.S.-operated full-body scanner and nearly succeeded in assassinating the governor of Kandahar [Tooryalai Wesa]…With two semi-automatic, Spanish-made Astra Cub pistols hidden inside their shoes under the soles of their feet, the pair were cleared by the operator of the machine, and managed to make it to the threshold of the governor's office in Kandahar before being shot dead by other guards." – *New York Times, April 28*

April 29, 2012 (NIGERIA): Suspected Boko Haram group gunmen killed at least 15 people at a Christian service in Kano. – *Reuters, April 30*

April 29, 2012 (NIGERIA): Suspected Boko Haram group gunmen killed four people in an attack on a church in Maiduguri. – *Reuters, April 30*

April 30, 2012 (SYRIA): Suicide bombers detonated explosives near a hotel and security buildings in Idlib, killing at least nine people. – *RTTNews, April 30*

April 30, 2012 (NIGERIA): A suicide bomber targeted a senior police official's convoy in Taraba state, killing 11 people. The official was not injured. – *Vanguard, April 30*